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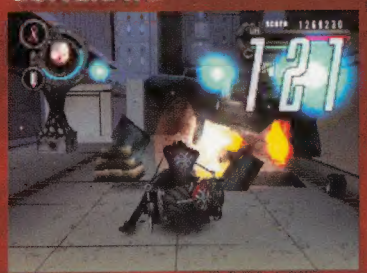

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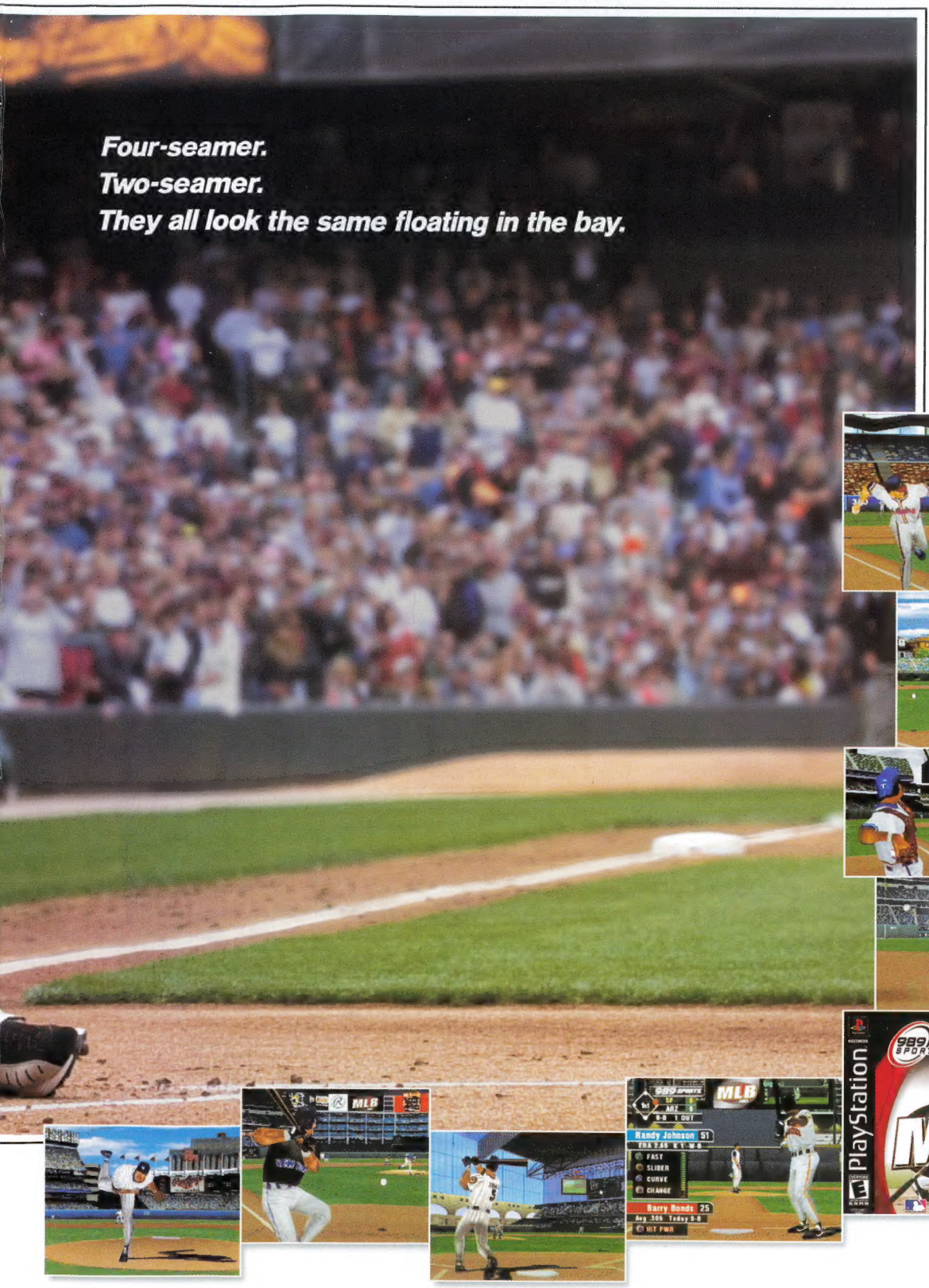

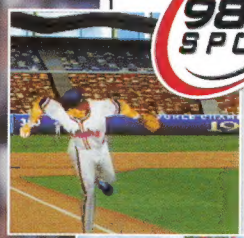

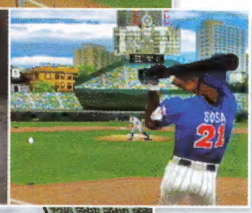

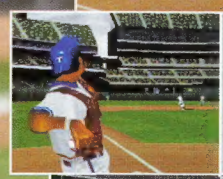

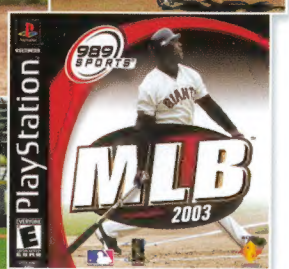

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XBOX

play

Although the subject is addressed elsewhere in this issue, I feel the need to express my views on the age-old argument of violence in videogames, now that it has actually come to fruition. Prior to *The Getaway*, I never even considered it an issue worth debating (ranting about, yes, but debating, no). Save for maybe *KingPin* and a few others, realistic violence in realistic present-day settings has been rare. My stance has always been to defend gaming, leaving the decision up to the individual, as we are free to do in this country, where I believe we should be turning our attention to real problems like poverty, our loophole-laden legal system, traffic, pollution, the retards on Capitol Hill, crime, and education (or the lack thereof). Our police and teachers should be our highest-paid professionals, yet they remain among the lowest; network TV continues to circle the drain; and much of our food is just a little bit healthier then a strychnine cocktail. America is slowly being lulled into a stupor, with a side order of cheese fries. Too many people sit in traffic longer than they do at their desks, because our hierarchy cares more about money than our citizen's health, well-being, and state of mind. I guess they figure that as long as the population is plopping down night after night watching canned episodes of other people's lives until they begin the daily grind anew, everything's dandy. Then every so often a worker in the ant farm snaps, and network news agencies springs into action: "Look, bad shit going down! Roll camera! Let's spread the pain!"

I, we, play videogames to escape this drudgery, so when they start pointing the finger at us, well, I just feel like chopping it off. Anyway, I fired up *The Getaway* the other day, and it hit me like a ton of bricks (albeit polygonal.) The sludge of reality has made its way into gaming, my main source of entertainment, and because so much of our society feeds on misery, it may catch on big, and thus begin to erode one of the few things in life I hold dear. Within seconds after the game begins, the word "f---k" is dispensed like Pez, followed by the brutal cold-blooded murder of a guy's wife in front of her young son who is kidnapped, and poured into a car. Next, the main character, screaming in agony as his wife dies in his arms, is prompted to get in the car and save Junior... game on! Go have fun! This doesn't look like *GTA III*, or *State of Emergency* either—our "it's cartoon violence" argument has dissipated; this looks like you and me. Now I'm not saying to not buy The Getaway; it's quite an achievement, actually. I'm merely pointing out that game consoles have reached a point where they can now duplicate reality, and raising the question: should we be pulling the trigger on realistic victims in videogames? Because let's face it, we're not in *Super Mario World* anymore.

Here's my quandary: why not sex instead of murder? Why must the same double standard that plagues society seep into gaming? We can show death and dismemberment on TV but not the beauty of a fine naked woman. I always thought that when the gaming envelope was pushed, it would be in the opposite direction—a provocative direction—taking the risk of cinema where, say, Lara's on top, getting-it-on for God and Country, but instead, I'm greeted with live-action *Snatch*. Hey, I'm the first guy in line for *GoodFellas,* but I'm not pulling the trigger. I'd rather not see gaming turn into the same shooting gallery I used to see on the evening news, before I stopped watching it, opting rather to fly on dragon-back or any number of fantastical situations—the type of adventure that elevates your mood rather than drop it into the toilet. This debate has been swirling around the office ever since *The Getaway* arrived, so we'd really like to know what you think. Aside from that, *Mario* is here! Quick, turn to page 60. Now this is living...

DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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Jon M Gibson
Executive Editor

On a recent trip to San Francisco, Jon heard a legend pertaining to the existence of Strawberry Village. A local girl, known merely as Alexis, described the Village as "magical," claiming that an immortality serum existed at the Village square. Alas, five dollars and a cab ride later, it turned out to be a not-so-mystical strip mall. Cute strawberry lady, though.

Brady Fiechter
Editorial Director

Brady took to the back streets of LA, Linkin Park's *Reanimation* pumping while he contemplated life and its newfound meaning, now that Mario Sunshine has made it a little bit better.

Michael Hobbs
Art Director

Ah, the sight of Michael happily at work laying out the September issue of **play**. What a contended air surrounds this fellow! When asked why he was looking so vacant, he would only respond, "Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario, Mario."

Nelson Lui
Associate Art Director

Nelson's been going through some changes. Lots of stress.

Tom Ham
Contributing Writer

Tom's disappearance last month resulted in a Play search party scouring the globe, but we eventually found the fearless freelance writer enjoying a quaint dinner with this beautiful, young lady. Then, after finishing his medium-rare sirloin, Tom responded: "The gnome was just a decoy, but this steak is delicious." Read Tom's *Haven* preview on page 046.

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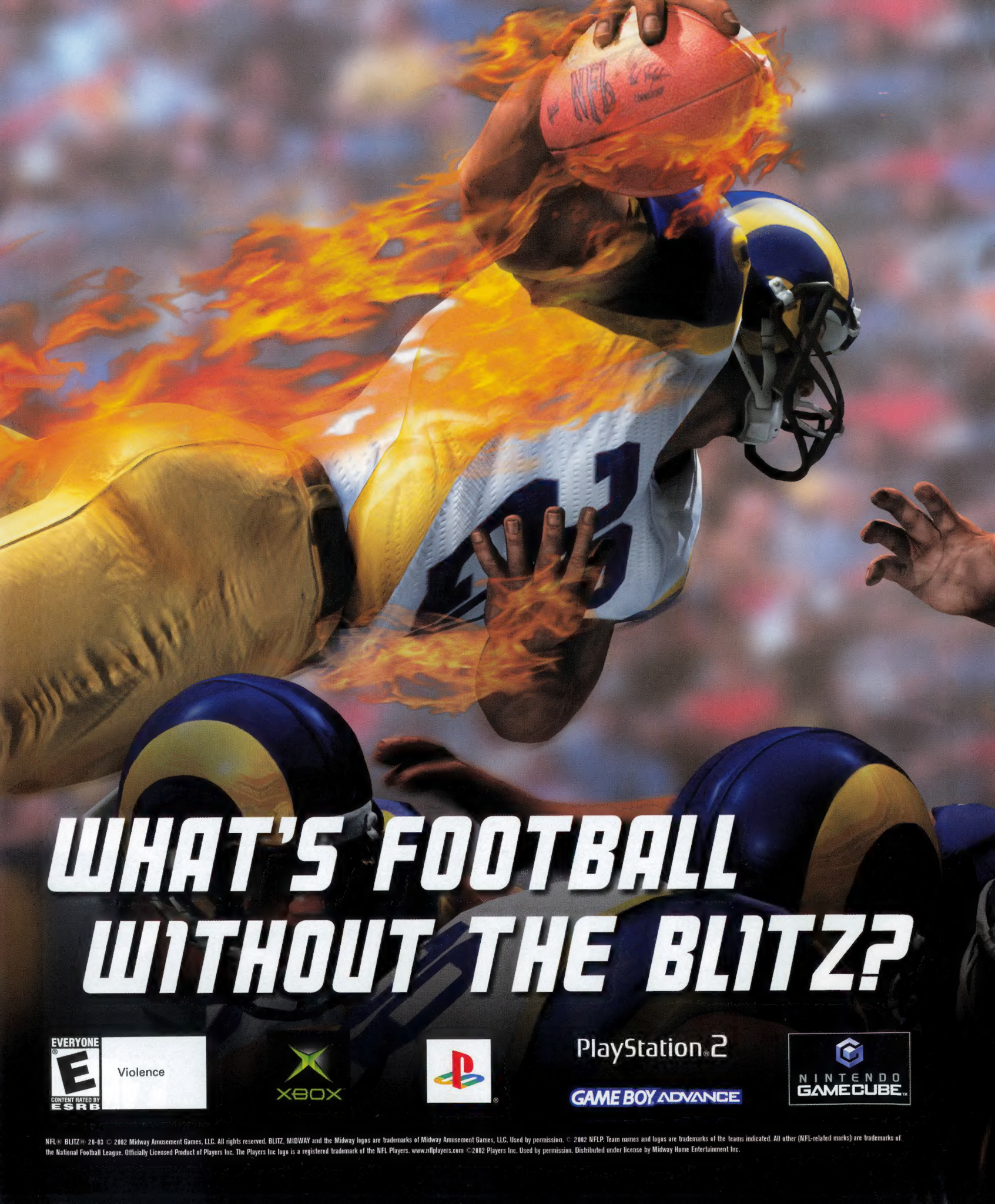

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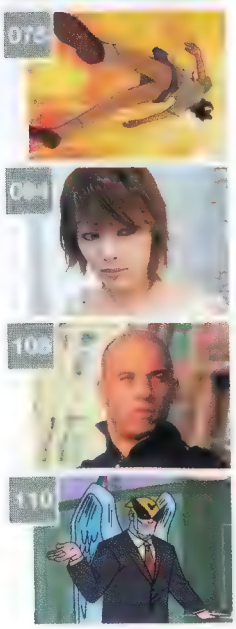

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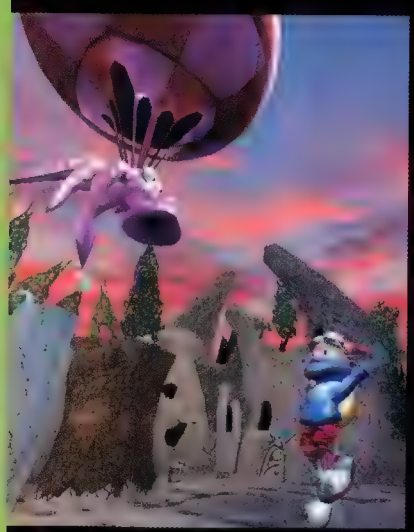

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ink

edited by **play** magazine staff

GETTING IN TOMB

Lara's score gets the royal treatment

In Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, Lara is embarking on an atpically dark, edgy journey to find those responsible for the death of her mentor. There is a new sophistication being brought to the game, and to further elevate its mood, the London Symphony Orchestra has taken the work of musicians Peter Connelly and Martin Iveson to uncommon heights with an 82-piece interpretation of their three-month writing session. Jill de Jong, the latest and greatest to play the part of the inimitable Croft, made an appearance in the recording sessions, which took place in the renowned Abbey Road studios. Props to Eidos for capturing the power of a full orchestra—other developers take note. Simply orchestrating the past music of the *TR* series would have been a beautiful touch in its own right, but with all this new material, the one questiion that remains is how extensively the material will be used in the game, if it will be a brief situational snipet recalling the past four adventures. All the mystery ends this November.

GHOST IN THE T.V.

Masamune Shirow's sci-fi epic returns

攻殻機動隊
STAND ALONE COMPLEX

Bandai Entertainment Inc., in conjunction with Production I.G., has announced its acquisition of the home video and broadcast rights in North America for the highly anticipated anime television series, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. Created by Production I.G. (*Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade, Love Hina*), with an original story by Masamune Shirow (*Appleseed, Ghost in the Shell*), directed by Kenji Kamiya, and music by Yoko Kanno (*Cowboy Bebop, Escaflowne*), *Stand Alone Complex* is the television series sequel to the animated film that redefined Japanese animation, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). *Ghost in the Shell* deals with the blurring of the lines that will inevitably change the fabric of human existence when the melding of man and machine become commonplace in society, as the digital and physical realms collide. *Ghost in the Shell*'s popularity spread far beyond the reaches of anime fans, due to to its not only compelling themes but also fluid, groundbreaking animation, mesmerizing score, and dramatic nuances mixed with what is considered by many the finest sci-fi landscapes ever drawn. The TV series will undoubtedly further the brands stellar production values and story telling.

You can visit the official *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* website at: http://www.production-ig.com/Ghost_TV.html. You can bet a video game is not far behind, to follow the exceptional *Ghost in the Shell* that appeared on PlayStation in '99.

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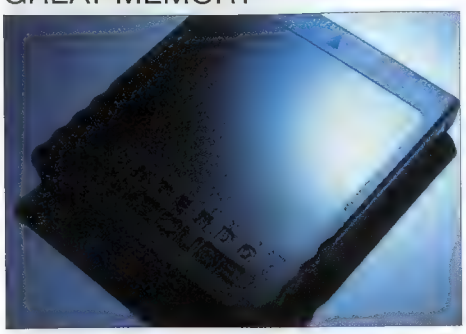
GREAT MEMORY



Alright, so it's not the sexiest announcement to come out of Nintendo recently, but the release of the new 251-block memory card will certainly ease those saving pressures that some have experienced. Priced at a very reasonable $19.95, the card offers four times the storage capacity of the original 59-block cards and comes in a sexy black.

MAKEUP!

So you're Doug Lyman, the slick, edgy director of *Swingers* and *Go*, and your latest powerplay, *The Bourne Identity*, has eclipsed the magical $100 million mark. What's next? First off, you lend your directing talent to Sony to shoot the commercials for their latest and greatest critter action-platform game, *Sly Cooper and the Theivius Raccoonus*. For the game's commercial spots that will be airing in mid-August, Lyman used his cinematic conditioning to add a very cool, very skilled luster to the project. We were invited to the closed set to check out Lyman in action and get a close-up of a very well trained raccoon strutting its stuff. The shoot took place in an old bank in downtown LA, where a robbery was staged; this one's got a juicy budget with sweat production values—Sony's most ambitious yet.

Turns out Lyman is a gamer, citing *Final Fantasy X* as one his most recent addictions. I asked him what his take is on videogame movies and the possibility of a future of actual quality productions. His response: if you want it done right, do it yourself. Don't be surprised if you see his name tagged to a future game-to-bigscreen extravaganza.

BROSNAN BONDS WITH EA'S BOND...

Now that EA's rocket-powered FPS series loosely based on the Bond universe has gone to the big time, movie Bond Pierce Brosnan is lending his face (or at least its mirror image in polys) for the next game in the series, *NightFire*. The game is still running off its own unique story and settings, but Brosnan's physical presence will certainly lend the added sense of an interactive version of the interminable spy flicks.

BIG GREEN ON A ROLL...

Two independent research groups have confirmed that the Xbox is officially on a roll. The NPD Group Inc. reported that Xbox posted a stunning sales increase of approximately 131 percent in the United States in the first two months following the hundred-buck price cut Microsoft adopted in May. In addition it has been reported that both *Project Gotham Racing* and *Dead or Alive 3*, have broken the million mark in worldwide sales. According to the International Development Group, this makes Xbox the first videogame system ever to have three million-unit-selling launch titles after just eight months on the market. The numbers put the system on track for another blockbuster holiday season, as gamers face a wall of green with over 200 Xbox's available by this Christmas. According to the NPD Group, Xbox has sold more than 10 million units of software in the first eight months the console has been on the market in the U.S.—the most software ever sold for a new videogame system in the United States in the same period. Microsoft Corp. recently reported that 20 million units of Xbox games were sold worldwide in its past fiscal year.

Although all three major game console manufacturers announced price cuts in May, Xbox has had the largest percentage gains with sales having spiked approximately 131 percent in the United States in the two months since the price cut, according to NPD.

ELECTRIC PLAYGROUND HITS100

From grassroots to a garden that'd make Martha green with envy (from her cell), *Electric Playground*, the weekly television show hosted by Tommy Tallarico that runs the gamut of industry-related content from news to reviews and interviews, will celebrate its 100th episode this month during its seventh season. "In the beginning, *Electric Playground* was a real grassroots effort as we grappled with translating our passion for videogames into a viable business," said Victor Lucas, president of Greedy Productions and co-host of *Electric Playground*. "Over the last eight years, we have seen the videogame industry grow exponentially, giving us the opportunity to bring our audience the most relevant reviews and interviews." Greedy Productions also produces the show "Judgment Day," G4's game review-based program hosted by Lucas and videogame expert Tommy Tallarico, which airs Thursdays at 10 p.m. EDT, 7 p.m. PDT on G4.

For more info on EP and how to get into it, dial 'em up at www.elecplay.com, and for the scoops on G4 visit www.g4tv.com.

THE GAMECUBE SUCKS

The top-selling, mature-rated video game for the Xbox and PS2, *Blood Omen 2*, will creep its way onto the GameCube this fall, marking the first time a videogame from the *Legacy of Kain* series will be available on a Nintendo platform. "We are excited to bring video gaming's most infamous villain, Kain, to the GameCube in Crystal Dynamics' *Blood Omen 2*," says Sean Amann, Marketing Director for Eidos Interactive. "With an emphasis on storyline, puzzle-solving and deadly combat, *Blood Omen 2* for GameCube promises to be one of the few dark thrillers available for the system to date." Unfortunately, what Sean failed to say was whether the game would feature any exclusive content or perhaps deal with the game's single flaw, Kain's athletic vampire "jog." One can only pray...

OOPS!

Last month in our ToeJam and Earl cover story we, er, switched 'em on page 28...and in the voice actor bios on 30. We know the difference, but... it was late. Sorry guys!

WATCHA GONNA DO WHEN THEY COME FOR YOU

Sony cracks down! Play a game, go to jail!

Drop that PlayStation and reach for the sky!

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. joined its trade association, Interactive Digital Software Association, in applauding the Canadian Department of Justice and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for a precedent-setting conviction for the illegal sale and distribution of circumvention devices. In other words, some poor sap got majorly reamed for selling "mod chips," busted by dudes on horses no less. The conviction marks the first time a defendant has been convicted under criminal statutes in Canada for selling modification chips. Hey, you have to start somewhere. Mod chips mimic the PlayStation technological security system to allow counterfeit and pirated PlayStation games to play on the system. The defendant Robert Garby pled guilty in the Ontario Court of Justice in Ottawa to six counts of criminal code violation and copyright law infringement and was fined a whopping $17,000 and sentenced to twelve months probation. Surprisingly this is nothing new. Previous mod chip cases in the United States include Howard Chen of Howie's Hi-Tech Games in Milpitas, California, snagged on July 12 for trafficking in mod chip and game enhancers. On May 24, 2002, defendant Rick Oliver was sentenced in the United States Court for the District of Nebraska for willful circumvention a copyright protection system for commercial advantage under the DMCA. Oliver was sentenced to seven months of jail time and was ordered to pay restitution to Sony Computer Entertainment America in the amount of $40,000! The dude's doing time, bubba style! On June 9, 2002, SCEA obtained summary judgment and a permanent injunction against Digital Stuff, Inc. of San Jose, California, for advertising, distributing, promoting and selling game enhancers, and on November 4, 1999, SCEA obtained a preliminary injunction against Michael and Carol Chaddon, doing business as GameMaster, Inc. in San Leandro, California, prohibiting them from advertising, distributing, selling or purchasing game enhancers or devices that contain a mod chip function. Damn, Sony should start a reality TV show, this is great stuff! (Interesting note: The Australian court decided that the mod chips do not violate the copyright of Sony's videogame systems; it lost a lawsuit against a man who sells the chips. The judge, Ronald Sackville, mentioned that promoting the chips is legal activities in Australia for playing import software.)

ROBOTECH
BATTLECRY
TO SAVE HUMANKIND, YOU MUST CHANGE INTO A HERO.
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top 10

READERS MOST WANTED

01/ SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE GC
02/ THE LEGEND OF ZELDA GC
03/ TOE JAM AND EARL III: MISSION TO EARTH XBOX
04/ METROID PRIME GC
05/ THE GETAWAY PS2
06/ SLY COOPER PS2
07/ QUANTUM REDSHIFT XBOX
08/ CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER PS2
09/ RATCHET & CLANK PS2
10/ RYGAR PS2

TOP TEN

01/ SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE GC
02/ SHINOBI PS2
PANZER DRAGOON ORTA XBOX

READERS TOP TEN

01/ ETERNAL DARKNESS GC
02/ WARCRAFT III PC
03/ SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 2 GBA
04/ RESIDENT EVIL GC
05/ MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE PS2
06/ THE MARK OF KRI PS2
07/ GRAND THEFT AUTO 3 PS2
08/ NEVERWINTER NIGHTS PC
09/ FREEKSTLYE PS2
10/ HALO XBOX

anime TOP TEN

01/ HELLSING
02/ NEON GENESIS EVANGELION: DEATH & REBIRTH
03/ EX DRIVER
04/ EARTH MAIDEN ARJUNA
05/ THE SOULTAKER
06/ BURN UP EXCESS
07/ STEEL ANGEL KURUMI
08/ ARMITAGE III: DUAL MATRIX
09/ GTO
10/ BUBBLEGUM CRISIS 2040 PERFERCT COLLECTION

BEST SELLING SEPTEMBER

HE MOVIE GAME PS2
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DRIVE PS
UPER MARIO WORLD 2 GBA
HALO XBOX

GAME RELEASE SCHEDULE*

PS2
9/03 Blade II
9/03 Rocket Power: Beach Bandits
9/03 Dual Hearts
9/03 Match Point Tennis
9/03 RoboCop
9/04 Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
9/04 Disney Golf
9/09 Riding Spirits
9/09 Armored Core 3
9/09 Conflict: Desert Storm
9/10 MSG: Federation vs. Zeon
9/10 The Scorpion King
9/11 Egg Mania
9/15 Pac-man Fever
9/15 Vexx
9/15 Grandia Xtreme
9/15 Kengo 2: Legacy of the Blade
9/15 Dino Stalker
9/15 Wild Arms 3
9/15 Ninja Assault with GunCon2
9/15 Dynasty Tactics
9/15 E.T. - Return to the Green Planet
9/15 Sly Cooper
9/16 NHL Hitz 20-03
9/16 Road Trip
9/16 Metropolismania
9/17 Jimmy Neutron Boy Genius
9/17 Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer
9/17 Superman: Shadow of Apokolips
9/17 Summoner 2
9/17 Gungrave
9/17 Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
9/17 Sega Soccer Slam
9/17 Myst 3 Exile
9/17 NHL 2003
9/23 SHOX
9/23 NASCAR Thunder 2003
9/23 Lego Island Xtreme Stunts
9/24 The Terminator: Dawn of Fate
9/24 Tekken 4
9/24 Taz: Wanted
9/24 Sega Bass Fishing Duel
9/24 TimeSplitters 2
9/24 Robotech: Battlecry
9/24 Robotech: Battlecry Collectors
9/27 Simpsons Skateboarding

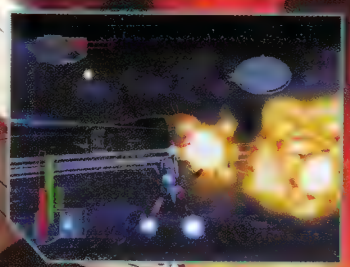
XBOX
9/01 Dynasty Warriors 3
9/3 Blade II
9/3 Sega GT 2002
9/3 WTA TOUR TENNIS
9/9 BACK PEDAL
9/10 Eggmania Eggstreme Madness
9/10 The Thing
9/10 Quantum Redshift
9/13 Dragon's Lair
9/16 NHL Hitz 20-03
9/17 The Terminator: Dawn of Fate
9/17 Taz: Wanted
9/17 MYST III: Exile
9/17 Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
9/17 Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer
9/23 NHL 2003
9/23 NASCAR Thunder 2003
9/23 Need For Speed 2HP
9/24 SeaBlade
9/24 Loons - The Fight for Fame
9/24 Chase
9/24 Robotech:Battlecry
9/24 Robotech: Battlecry Collector's
9/24 Rayman Arena
9/24 Lord of the Rings
9/24 TimeSplitters
9/24 Lotus Challenge
9/30 Conflict: Desert Storm

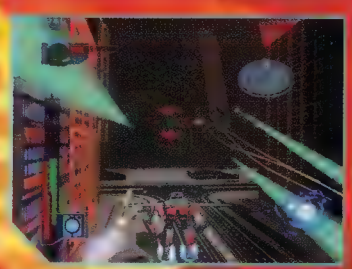
GAMECUBE
9/3 Tom and Jerry
9/3 Galleon: Islands of Misery
9/3 Pac-Man Fever
9/3 NCAA College Football 2K3
9/4 Rocket Power: Beach Bandits
9/4 Scooby Doo! Night of 100 Frights
9/10 The Scorpion King
9/10 Egg Mania Eggstreme Madness
9/10 4X4 EVO 2
9/10 Big Air Freestyle
9/10 Freekstyle
9/16 Monsters INC.
9/16 NHL Hitz 20-03
9/16 Animal Crossing
9/17 Worm's Blast
9/17 Mystic Heroes
9/17 Crash Bandicoot
9/17 Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer
9/17 WTA Tour Tennis
9/23 Star Fox Adventures
9/23 Need For Speed Hot Pursuit 2

*SHIP DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CHANGE OR DIE.

ROBOTECH BATTLECRY





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Whether you have questions, criticisms—or if you just need to vent and say what's on your mind—write us here at **play**. It's time to get a major forum going...off-line. **Email your queries and concerns to:**

letters@play-magazine.com

HE SEES STUPID PEOPLE.

You people down there at **play** have the right ideas for creating a magazine based on the ideal of gaming and the life of those who have been playing since they were wee lads. Yet I still see people around in many areas including my own who just keep saying there's not enough about games, people who tend to say the unthinkable about my beloved magazine that I purchase every month. These are the same people who still waste there money on mags that give away advice that you can get from such sites as gamefaqs and spend their time looking through mags at the store they never buy. The magazine is perfect the way it is, well balanced, and should go international.
Regal Sin

We hate those people! Yeah, we don't bathe our magazine in games you should avoid (because we don't have to! Yippee!) but rather, devote more space to the good stuff and cool stuff to do while the console cools down. Those posers bend up our pages for paying customers, the swine! So if you see one, give him a crack on the head and flow him a code so he'll go home! Okay, don't really crack him on the head.

JEFF GETS IT.

In the past 6-8 months I've rediscovered videogames after a long hiatus. Now with 3 of the 4 current consoles (and a credit card bill to match), I can say that I'm a certified gamer-for-life. However, like any hobby I needed a monthly mag to compliment my habit. All other print magazines seem to cater only to a 14-year-old fanbase and frankly, I was tired of looking at some kid's Crayola creation of Spider-Man and Star Fox every month. I am however a subscriber to Gamespot's new Complete service and must say I am happy with it. High-res movies and video reviews are very cool indeed. Unfortunately, it's hard to surf the web while riding on the bus, and quite frankly, I prefer a finite monthly mag to the bottomless pit of information that is GS. Unless I read everything 5 times a week, I'll never know what I missed without plowing through pages of archived features. Suffice it to say then, that early this week when I first discovered Play I was overjoyed to flip through and find a very professional, cool, and dare I say mature layout that clearly didn't have the under-18 demographic in mind. (Wow. Don't I sound elitist? Sue me, I'm a 21-year-old snob.) Anyway, after much rhetoric, here's what I wanted to say: thank you! I love the magazine—the high quality of writing, the games chosen for coverage, the good mix of other stuff, the editorials—the package. It's there, it's now, I'm gonna subscribe. Congrats on a great new product and I wish you great success!
Jeff T.

No--thank you! We make this magazine this way, in the hopes of hearing those very words. And hey, there's no debtors prison so, run up the card until it bleeds, than grab another... Okay, don't really, but at least you're getting your money's worth. For what it's worth, we all do the same thing.... Dude, the Crayola part was priceless.

MOMMY COOLEST

Love your magazine. The layout is amazing. One quick question: My mom would buy an Xbox if *ToeJam & Earl, All Funked Up* included the original *Toe Jam & Earl*. Do you think it's a possibility? Is there any chance?
T. Byrd

Okay, first of all, how old is your mom and how is it she's that cool? She'll buy an Xbox for a classic Genesis game? Dude, never move out. Here are your options: Tell her it's in there (it's not, by the way) but you have to beat the game to unlock it, then, never beat it. Or, better yet, hit the Net and track down a used Genesis (or better yet, a Nomad) and a copy of *TJ&E*.

You should be able to put that together for less than 50 bucks, a small price to pay to get an Xbox and *ToeJam & Earl* into the house. By the way, the name has been changed to *Mission to Earth*, to protect us from the evil of that play on words.

YAY

Yay for Play!
Josh

Yay for Josh!
Play

VIRTUAL ON

I feel so happy to finally drop you a line after not having Web access for a while! I could have done so by snail mail, but I honestly didn't have the time. I've been waiting for a mag like yours for a long time (since the GF era!), so it is a pleasure to be a subscriber! I'm thru with all the other magazines 'cept for PSM. So... -Will there be a Play-URL?

Thank You for taking the time to read my mail and I look forward to each issue monthly!
DIESELBOYED.

First, thanks, we look forward to making it for you! 1) Yes, we are launching a site; in fact, it should be up by the time you read this. If it's not, someone's in trouble.

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play games

review legend

perfect
stellar
great
good
average
poor

Let the bodies hit the floor!

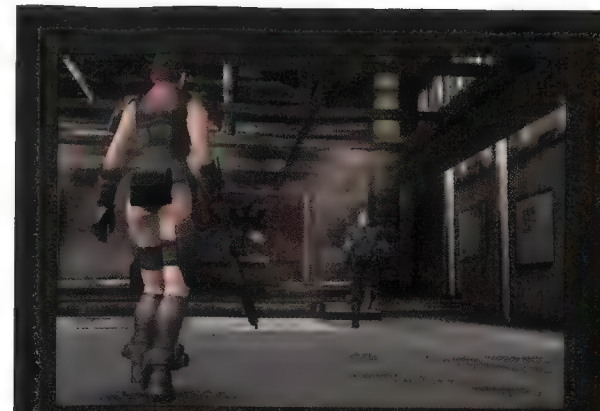
Old-school Japanese Contra seeps back into our lives to remind us all we've become a bunch of 3D sissies.

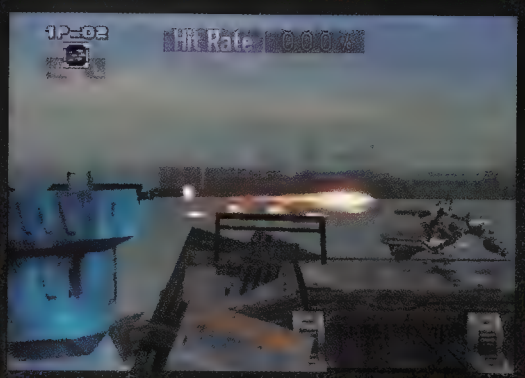
words dave halverson

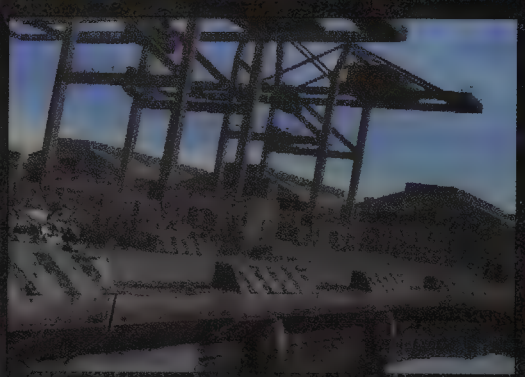
There are two types of people in the world...of gaming—those who care deeply about the phrase "old-school Japanese *Contra*," and those who do not. Its resurgence, especially now, was unexpected, especially in its original hard-as-nails 2D form. Konami is making an important statement with *Shattered Soldier*, on the one hand, saying to its most avid customer, "We haven't forgotten you," and to the rest of the gaming public, "Come test the 2D waters, and let's see what you 3D weenies have got." There exist enough hardcore PS2 players to make *Contra* a success, but to reach the blockbuster status it enjoyed on 16-bit, Konami will need some new recruits, and that's the tricky part. Making *Contra* accessible to the masses while appeasing its battle-hardened, butt-smokin' patrons...well, that's a fine line.

For the uninitiated, *Contra* will serve as a kind of videogame boot camp, introducing them to the rigors of 2D, the ultimate training ground for overall gaming prowess. Back in the '90s, great games were few and far between, so, for instance, when a game like *Contra* or *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* surfaced, it was all about trial and error—methodically memorizing the patterns of entire levels worth of unholy obstacles and relentless onslaught. The ability to go through a stage on one credit and beat the boss unscathed filled your entire being with empowerment, and rightfully so: your hand-eye coordination and concentration had become wickedly honed instruments of pleasure; you made the grade. Although we had no Internet at the time, there was a sort of invisible connection between players, knowing that there were thousands doing the same thing as you, breaking only to pee and refill their beverage of choice. We used to call each other after every boss: "Dude, how insane was that!"

Contra: Shattered Soldier is spawned from that mold. After three completely un-*Contra*-like sequels, the original team has assembled to

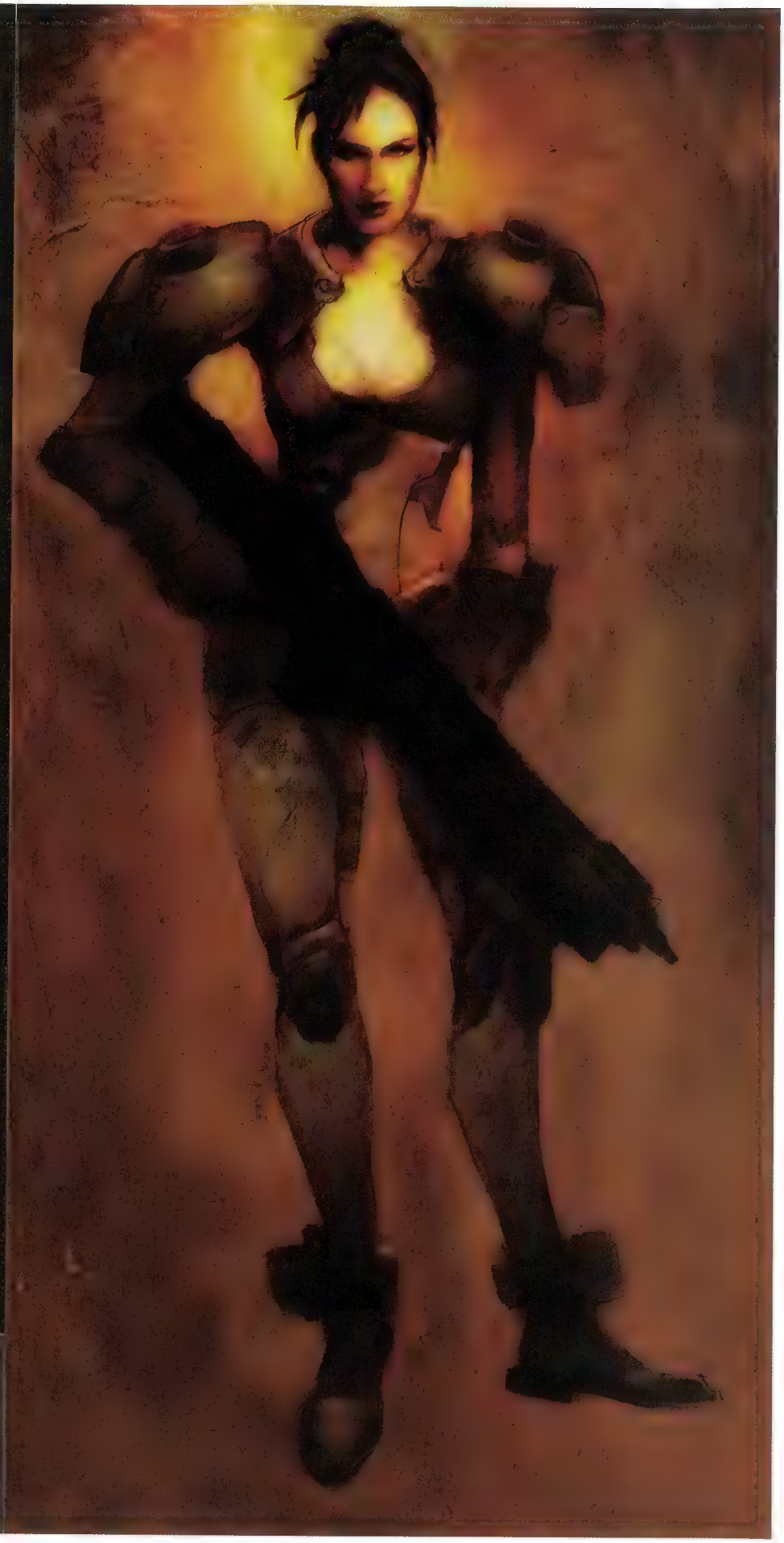






Say hello to my little friend that really likes to blow bugs and acid out of its nose and puke toxic waste...

"I'M CHALLENGING GAMERS WITH CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER." - **NAKAZATO-SAN**

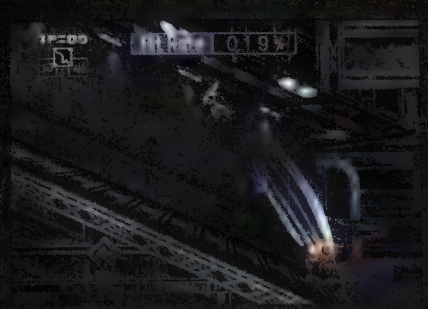


art ashley wood

resuscitate not only *Contra* but, if they have it their way, 2D gaming. To a lot of new PS2, Xbox and GameCube users, 2D will be something new, and maybe, just maybe, it will spark something. As much as I enjoyed *Maximo*, I'd rather have seen *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* get the *Shattered Soldier* treatment. Why would I? Because when you see what the PS2 can do on a 2D canvas in the hands of an experienced team, you're going to say, "Oh my God." I forgot to mention one thing back there: In order for a game to hold your interest long enough to achieve all of that memorization, and then want to go through the same levels again and again until you could move through them all sequentially, took four things: the right universe, great character designs, spectacular backgrounds, and perfect music. We used to play games to see the next level, not to see what happened next, so they had to blow you away, or back in the stack they went. The team behind *Shattered Soldier* knows this because they helped invent it. *Shattered Soldier* poses an interesting quandary: it's so brutally hard you have to give yourself up to it completely, but it's so beautiful, sometimes you just can't. The characters (one male one female) look like real futuristic soldiers running through your TV (see the interview if you want to know more), and the 3D backgrounds and hardware they throw at you simply astound. Nothing can prepare you for this game's impact; it smacks you in the face, and says, "Whaddaya got, pussy?"

The biggest departure from the originals is the weapons system. Instead of losing a weapon when you take a hit, and then shooting the right one back out of the sky (hopefully), you now have three locked down from which to toggle, deciding which works best for each situation and/or massive behemoth that wants to kill you with projectile vomit.

The gameplay is fast, frantic and unforgiving, requiring surgical precision to truly excel at. In a mild scenario: two missile-riding enemies come from behind, requiring that you're already shooting in their direction to kill, and



Love the smell of napalm in the morning, but not when it's flaming up my crack...

the moment the second one explodes, your gun has to already be fixed diagonal-right, shooting-out the mortar dropping from the massive airship that's now blocking the sun. Annihilating it perfectly, allowing not one canister to fall, you'll have just enough time to preempt its six laser cannons swooping down just overhead, which, if you don't knock out methodically, will fry you repeatedly—game over. Then it's on to a massive turret that drops a napalm charge that spreads fire, requiring you to jump at precisely the right moment—or fry—followed by a jet-pack brigade of grenade-dropping enemy soldiers. Jump to dodge the flames and hit them in the process, and you're toast again. This all happens in under a minute, and (little hook here) you're riding a jet cycle. Next, the screen shifts to 3D, coming at you, battling the airship (now transformed into a train) in a sequence of dodging projectiles that's just...mean. The collision detection is quite literally to the pixel—even nick the tail end of a poof of smoke and you are dead. Now do that for 5 minutes until your hands are dripping... and welcome to gaming. At this point, the boss is still a stage away, and he will break you repeatedly before you master his multi-faceted attack, but it is so awe-inspiring, you simply won't care, or rest, until it's dead.

I'm sure you'd like to know how many levels there are in *Shattered Soldier*, and how the game progresses, which it turns out, is an interesting story. At the start, four levels are open, and you can dive into any from the outset, although it's wise to start with mission one and make your way through, as they're arranged in order of difficulty. Initially I was told that was all there was, save some extras for anyone insane enough to beat it, and get this—with no difficulty select or save (aside from a high score). Needless to say, I freaked out. With the difficulty locked on insane, three men, and three-hits-and-your-out set-up, even the best players would likely not take the time to beat it with no pay-off in site. I mean, this isn't the '90s; there are tons of games to choose from. In order for *Contra* to make

"THE ORIGINAL TEAM HAS ASSEMBLED TO RESUSCITATE NOT ONLY CONTRA BUT 2D GAMING."

a splash, it would need to be accessible to more than just the hardest of hardcore gamers; it would also have to be longer, so, I began to dig for answers. Luckily I was working with a Konami Rep who knows I'm fully versed in the subject and understood my concerns, and took the time to relay my dismay to the team, along with my questions which, submitted before I got the final framework, resonated with concern. Among the many revelations in my reply, this one—"Largely due to your feedback and comments about the difficulty in the game, the DEV team confirmed today that they will indeed be including a difficulty option in the opening menu in the game. Hallelujah! :)"—made me especially ecstatic. Whenever you can actually effect a decision as key as this, well, that's what it's all about. I want everyone to play this game and, as a huge fan, have a stake in its success. The Rep went on to say that after beating the initial four stages, which will now be do-able, three more lie in wait. So now we're talkin'; the standard was 6, so 7, that's icing. The DEV team also confirmed that there will be 9-10 hours of gameplay for average gamers and that only the expert gamers who have mastered the game's patterns (by having invested a lot of time into the game) will see it through in a matter of a few hours. Trust me, that's conservative; I was weaned on 2D and had no idea how soft I'd become until *Contra* came rolling back into town.

In terms of the "core" versus "casual" gamer appeal, Konami is marketing this game to both, so Contra has a real shot at converting the masses back to 2D, which is really the only area of gaming currently being overlooked. With the current shortage of original ideas due to an over-saturated 3D action-adventure market, wouldn't it be poetic if 2D made it all the way back? Imagine 2D *Castlevania* with the graphic punch of *Shattered Soldier*...

A couple more things worth mentioning: *Shattered Soldier* has real-time cinemas that link it to *Contra 3: The Alien Wars* and, I'm sure, an unlock-able secret character and a host of goodies for anyone skilled enough to see the credits roll. So, in the end, *Contra: Shattered Soldier* is everything we could have hoped for and more, erasing any residual bad taste, re-introducing the series with a resounding call to arms.

developer interview overleaf ➔

INTERVIEW

From the left: producer Nobuya Nakazato, senior manager Kenichiro Honda, and illustrator Ashley Wood.

Question 1
Has 3D made us soft? Do you think it's a risk designing a game in this day and age that only the most talented will be able, or willing to, stick with? I mean, *SS* is extremely difficult for gamers weaned on 2D. In America, these days, hard games often get hammered in the press and sell poorly as a result. Do you believe that there are enough die-hards left to make *Shattered Soldier* a success?

Question 2
***Shattered Soldier* is one of the best-looking and -playing 2D games we've ever seen; congratulations, it's astounding. Is the pay-off so great for those who master the four stages available that it's worth the investment of time required to beat them in one sitting? This could take ordinary humans and even great players days on end to memorize, while others may give up day one, knowing they're just not capable.**

Subject: Difficulty
Answered by: Nakazato-san, Producer

First of all, we would like to mention that we're still adjusting the game. That does not necessarily mean that it's going to be easy. What we want to target in *Contra: Shattered Soldier* is the basic game design where the player can always get into the game anytime. As you play more, you master the gameplay and will improve your skills. When the player gets good enough, it will get the player to the ending sequence. The strategy for *Contra: Shattered Soldier* is actually very simple, but at first glance, some of you may think that the game looks as if it's an impregnable fortress!
We're very disappointed with the 3D games nowadays (we think the games merely appeal to people from a visual perspective, but the overall game designs are not very good). Most of these games lack in the basic game system, such as how attacks should be made, and therefore, a skillful player cannot enjoy the game because you can just button-mash your way through the game. This is a very clumsy game experience. A lot of these games have fallen apart with the offensive and defensive parts between the enemy and the player... Creators have easily given up on the principal part of the action game, the battle system. They tend to balance out or hide the main action part by adding additional elements like "find a key to the next level" or give a mission to find some certain things in the game... A lot of times these types of elements are patched up to pass it off as a full game. A lot of gamers are now used to these types of games. They have forgotten the game experience in the past, where each player was given a chance to come up with certain tactics. But I must tell you, this was the fun part in action games!

Now, this is what I think about the future of gamers. Most gamers at a certain point will get tired of flashy CG movies, and when they do, they will get bored with videogames. They will eventually go do something else as videogames need to offer better game play to keep their interest. I'm challenging gamers with *Contra: Shattered Soldier* now! I want to challenge against the trend that goes with this industry now! Some of the gamers today have never experienced games like ours before. They have only dealt with fancy 3D games. Some players will definitely lose their confidence, or be at a loss when they first play our game. With a few more plays, though, players will see that *Contra: Shattered Soldier* has a lot of gameplay depth. If you play the game with aggressiveness, you will feel more excitement and accomplishment after you have finished the game. We guarantee that! I would be really happy if people enjoyed this game like the games in the past, where it's a straight, fun action game.

Question 5
Tell us about these characters. They animate exactly like real people. Are they motion captured?

Subject: Character Animation
Answered by: Nakazato-san, Producer

We did not use motion capture in this development. All the animation was done by hand. If you do motion capture with action games, the movement will look dull and in some part, the fast-paced game experience will be ruined in the game balance. In order to make it realistic, sometimes you have to fake it out with precise calculations.

Question 6
We're surprised to find that the weapons dynamic has changed. Taking hits, players used to lose their weapons, with more floating by to shoot out of the sky. You've locked down three in this game. Why?

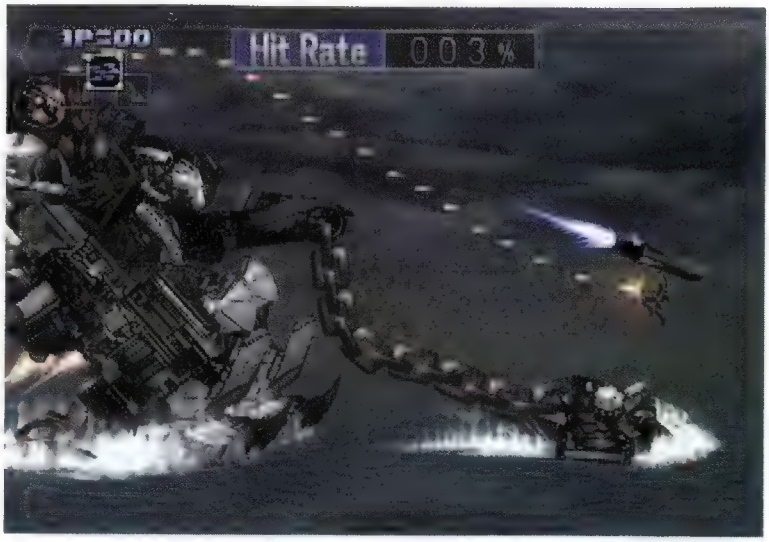
Subject: Weapons System
Answered by: Nakazato-san, Producer

The reason why we limited the weapon types to three (with charge shot making it six total) is because we wanted to emphasize the importance of weapon selection in link with the game tactics. The player is given or, maybe I should say, the player has to confront a reality where he/she needs to select the right weapon according to what he or she is facing. This sounds troublesome, but the fact is, back in the old *Contra* games where the player was really having trouble in the battle with one machine gun, has changed to a better system here with *Shattered Soldier*. The player can easily change the weapon type, which is going to make it easier to conquer a stage. We firmly believe that this gives the player a chance to have him/her think assertively and gives wider gameplay options.

Question 7
Great music! Sounds like Rob Zombie without vocals! Who's at the helm? What's your secret?

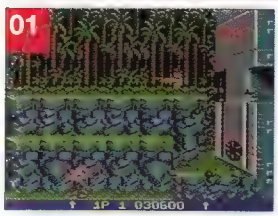
Subject: Music
Answered by: Akira Yamaoka

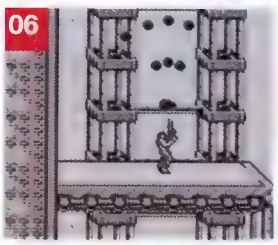
Thank you very much for your compliment! Hi, I'm Akira Yamaoka, the Sound Director of *Contra: Shattered Soldier*. I'm very happy to know that you felt Rob Zombie in the game, 'cuz I was targeting to express that in the first place. I wanted a sound somewhat like what Rob Zombie had—a "modern heavy" type of music. I guess the game *Contra* has given me some inspiration to recollect this type of music. With this game, I wanted to make full use of the sound, at the same time faithfully keeping the sound taste of *Contra*. I feel disappointed with sound people in the game industry because a lot of them do not think much about the sound development or take great importance in sounds as in-game music. A lot of games have evolved and are well liked as entertainment these days, yet a consciousness towards game music is still yet left behind. I acknowledge the fact that it's still regarded as a shallow element that dominates the overall game, but I can say here that I'm different from the majority of the sound creators—very confident of what I'm doing.
Play the game and you will experience how the music links with the fun game elements that *Contra* has. With sound effects, for instance, if you're making an explosion sound, you hear "BOOM!" and with the launcher sound, "DGHHN!" to bring out the experience of the game. The *Contra* sound is made very differently compared with other games. Yet, the sound does not go ahead of the game nor go behind the game. If you devote time into the game, you will feel touched by the music...and these types of elements are sprinkled throughout the game. As a result, it comes out as one fun game, of which we can say, "It's a masterpiece that has reached the *maximum*!"

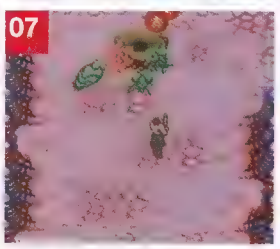


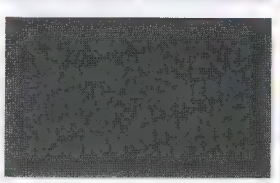
Four out of five gamers who prefer action games recommend Contra over the other leading brands.

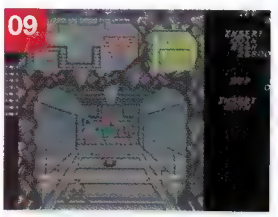
CONTRA: THROUGH THE AGES

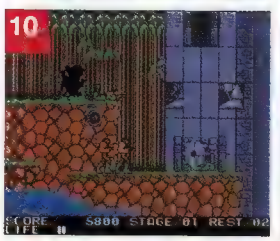


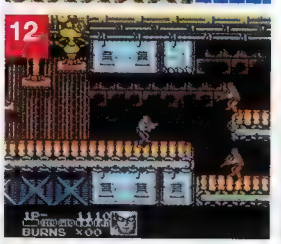


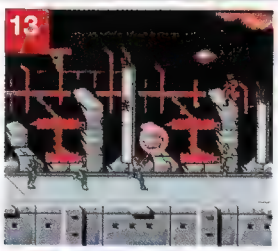


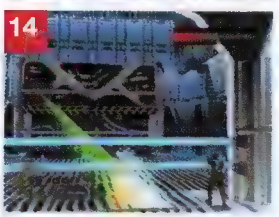












My first experience with Contra was on the NES. Along with Ninja Gaiden, Metal Gear, Castlevania, The Legend of Zelda, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Mega Man, and Blaster Master, it helped shape a love for gaming that would never waver. The name, Contra, is as synonymous with the label "legendary series" as any single brand can possibly be. The nineties were rough on Contra, as its faithful rejected the shift to 3D, although we'll never be sure if it was the medium at fault, as much as it was the fact that it wasn't developed by Konami, but rather Appaloosa, a good developer, if not great, just not for our Contra. It's been nearly a decade since Hard Corps assaulted the Sega Genesis, and now, we begin anew...

"CONTRA HELPED SHAPE A LOVE FOR GAMING THAT WOULD NEVER WAVER."

01. **Gryzor** / Amstrad
02. **Contra** / Arcade
03. **Super Contra** / Arcade
04. **Gryzor** / Commodore 64
05. **Contra III** / Game Boy
06. **Operation C** / Game Boy
07. **Probotector** / Game Boy Color (Europe)
08. **Contra Hard Corps** / Genesis
09. **Gryzor** / MS-DOS
10. **Gryzor** / MSX (Japan)
11. **Contra** / NES
12. **Contra Force** / NES
13. **Super C** / NES
14. **C: The Contra Adventure** / PS
15. **Contra: Legacy of War** / PS, Saturn
16. **Gryzor** / Sinclair Spectrum
17. **Contra 3: Alien Wars** / SNES

PS2

Contra: Shattered Soldier — preview

available: **october**

Shattered Soldier is a triumph, serving as a testament to 2D gaming's viability and a challenge to anyone who calls themselves a gamer.

BELLYBALL

words brady fiechter

Inordinately large, firm, round, supple, playfully bouncy breasts have never been the centerpiece of *Dead or Alive*, but they certainly have been a showcase of the lovely lady combatants, and every review of the game has cleverly referenced their presence. Because the fact that *Dead or Alive* does indeed contain gifted women with breasts that jiggle is a big deal. And you say fricking stop with the sarcasm? And I say, no, it really is a big deal! Just look at this new beach volleyball game, a frolicking sports simulation that some players will definitely categorize as a simulation, starring the ladies of Dead or Alive playing volleyball in bikinis.

I can't yet tell you how the game plays, but Team Ninja, the accomplished *Dead or Alive* series creators, are at the helm. Interesting switch, going from 3D fighting to volleyball, but some of you would have it no other way, because, well, I'll say it again: this is a volleyball game starring the ladies of *Dead or Alive* wearing bikinis.

XB

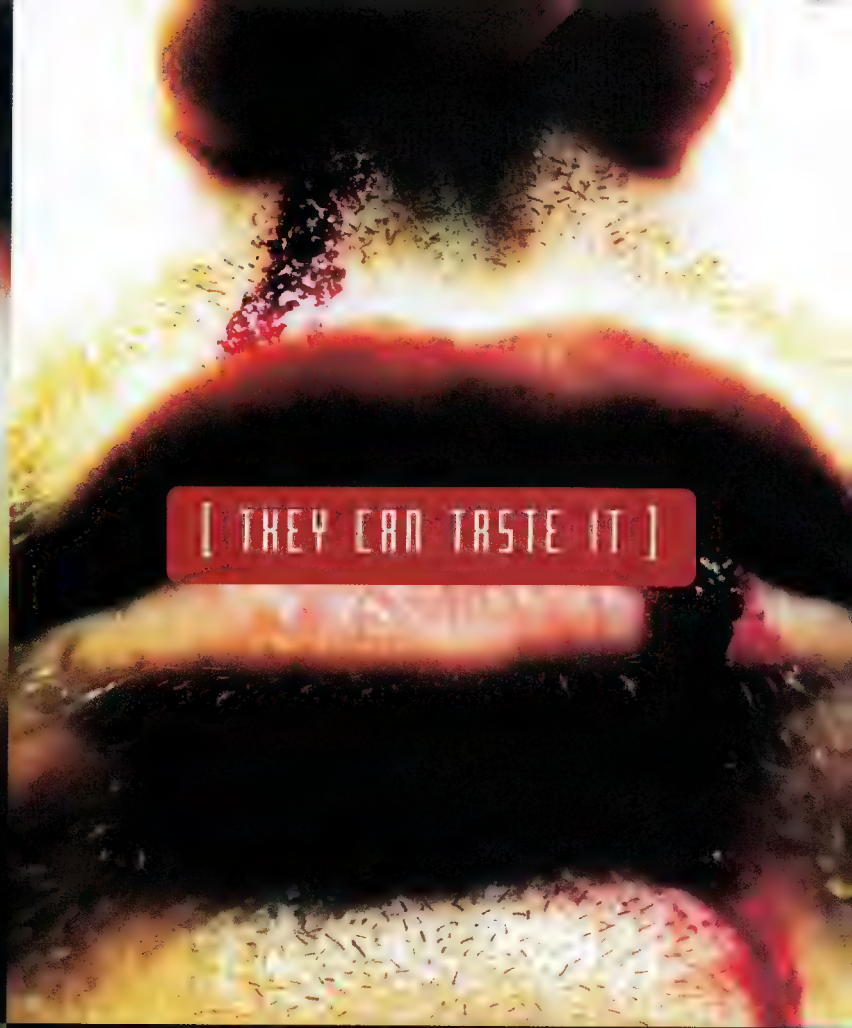
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball

preview

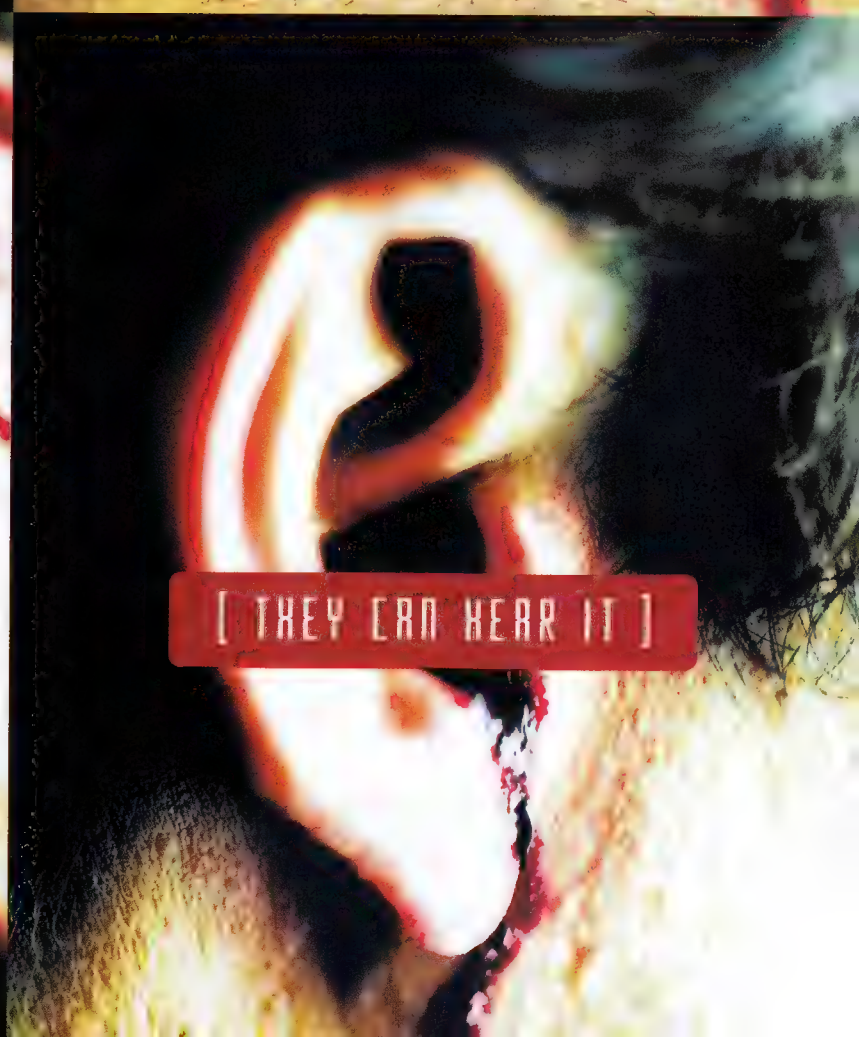
available: winter

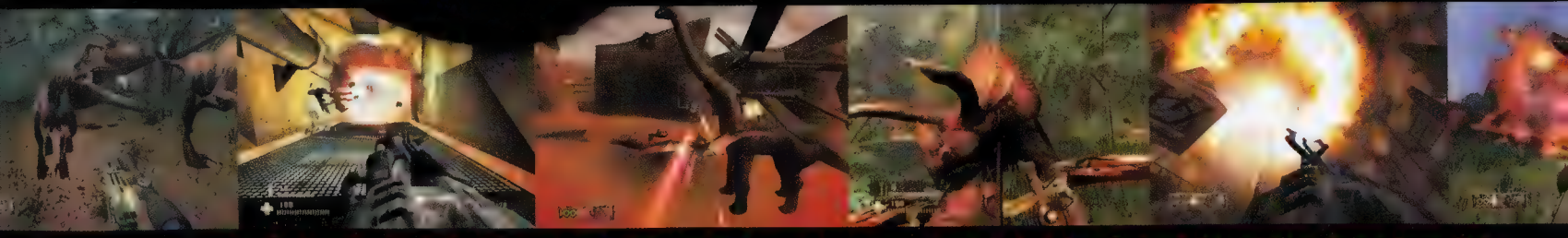
You've already formed your opinion, and I really don't want to know what it is.

[THEY CAN SEE IT]


[THEY CAN TASTE IT]

[THEY CAN SMELL IT]


[THEY CAN HEAR IT]



A Savage World So Real... You'll smell the smoke of war-torn cities and burning jungles. See the flaming battlefields below from the

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM TEEN TO MATURE
T-M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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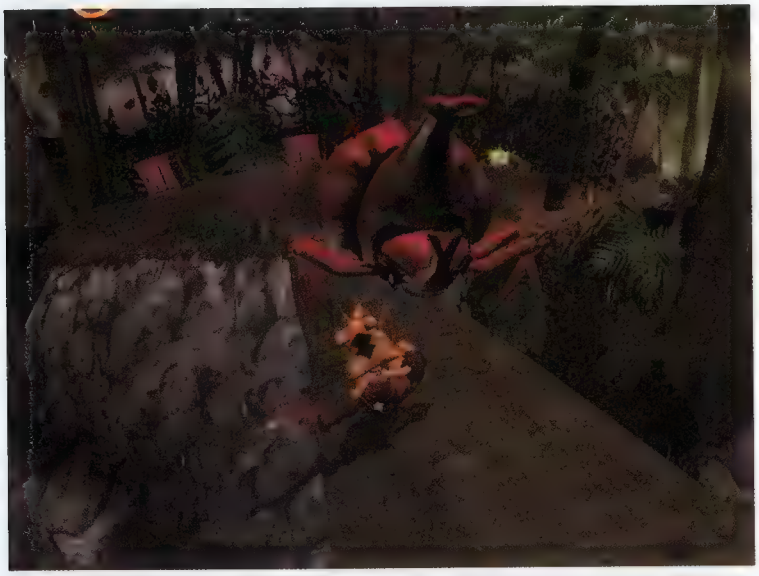
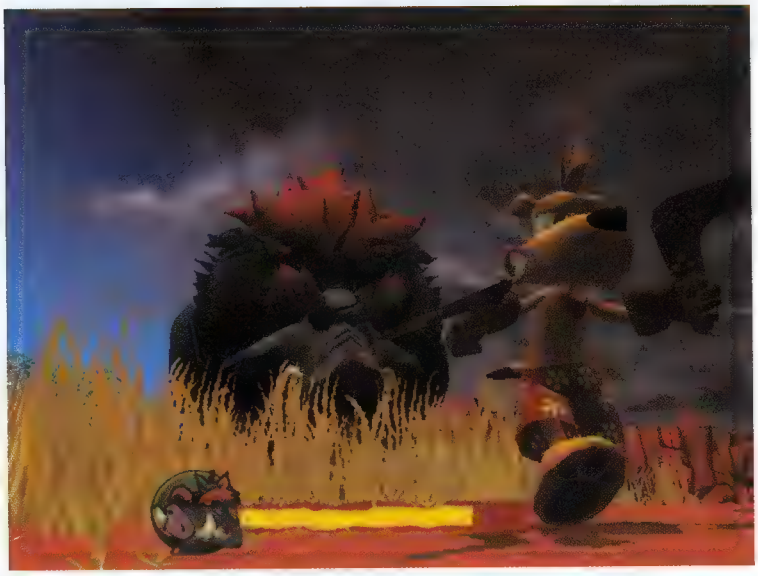
Acclaim

YOU RIPPER!

Krome Studios new critter lands himself a cushy spot on the EA roster. The birth of a franchise? You betcha!

words dave halverson





To say that *Ty Tiger* is a surprise coming from EA is an understatement. When it comes to sports—BIG and otherwise—we've come to expect the very best from them, but in the critter-based action genre, they're not exactly at the top of my list. This was a move I regarded in the back of my feeble mind as a low priority endeavor to test the fizzy, fruitier waters of gaming, so I was shocked and amazed to find a full-blown Ty universe waiting for me on the preview disc. In the vein of the Rare/Nintendo pedigree, *Ty the Tasmanian Tiger*, hinges on a beautiful, rustic Banjo Tooie-style central hub, leading to fourteen-plus massive levels that take Ty through billabongs, rainforests, swamps, snow-covered mountains, the Outback, white sandy beaches, and even the Great Barrier Reef. Each lush beauty is good for one very long go—to ransack the entire sprawl, but more likely several, and then it's back in for an often-times grueling race. Whether you need to give it another go to reap all that Krome studios has sewn, you'll want to dive back into each one regardless—the mark of a truly well devised adventure.

The central goal of the game is to collect the five Talismans heisted by Boss Cass, and free Ty's fellow felines from a place called Dreamworld. In order to do so, Ty needs to find and/or earn enough Thunder Eggs in each level to power the Talisman Machine, an enormous ray gun capable of slipping Ty between portals. Each level also houses 300 glowing opals, good for one Thunder Egg, a set number of imprisoned Bilbies that are good for another, and a number of Golden Cogs, which Ty can exchange for Rang upgrades, like Fire, Multi, Zoom etc. And he'll need 'em.

All of this craziness is brought to you in true Aussie style; not a cheesy ploy, mind you—Krome Studios is in Australia—so we are talkin' full-on Croc Hunter, Paul Hogan Outback type stuff. When I thought it was a gimmick (although Americans go bonkers for a bit of the old Aussie magic), I thought it was going to be just plain sad, but, on the contrary, it's almost reason enough alone to buy the game. A Dunny (that's Australian for outhouse) marks Ty's progress; need I say more? Considering I now have Aussie slang literally coursing through my veins, I'm doing a helluva job of not busting into a cliché orgy, and I'd like to keep it that

way, so I'll leave it at that.

As for execution, hang on to your wallabies; Ty goes where few, if any, such games have gone before. By placing more emphasis on the environments and effects than character models (they're simplistic but get the job done), Krome has created some of the most spectacular environments ever seen on the PS2. The leaves on the trees defy logic, patches of tall grass sway in the breeze and bend as Ty walks over them, and the texture blending literally erases every last seam. You never see where the road ends and the vertical begins. The lighting, too, is extraordinary, as is the water, and not only does Ty leave paw prints as he trots ahead, but they seem to have actual depth and change according to the surface. This is one extremely awesome-looking game.

The action starts out pretty much as you'd expect, then gradually ramps up as Ty amasses skills and assorted Rang upgrades. The Rangs add a welcome dimension to the game's ample doses of platforming, exploration, and clobbering indigenous creatures (like frill lizards, mud crabs, and gators), and Ty's not afraid to ride what he conquers, including Bull the Razorback, a massive hog you get to ride for an entire level. This really put the game over the top for me.

The real fun, though, comes in the overall execution. There are plenty of great scenarios built into each level, and exploring them, due to the dense nature of the bush, is completely addicting. Ty also has a keen hover move that's used generously throughout, adding a dynamic of flight—ascending from lofty perches with an endless line of sight—that never grows old.

Ty's girlfriend, Shazza, plays a supporting roll; the Koala inventor is on board with the gizmos; and Ty gets his intelligence from a cockatoo, Maurie, who sounds like the Outback's answer to Dame Edna, as well as a platypus, Rex, and the Bilbies. We got ours directly from the lion's mouth: Here's what Krome had to say about their new pet...

developer interview overleaf

PS2 GC XB

Ty the Tasmanian Tiger preview

By the looks of it, it would seem that EA's first toss at launching a character based actioner is a dead ringer. First Hogan, then the Croc Hunter, and now this? Crikey, it's an Aussie invasion!

INTERVIEW

Robert Walsh, CEO of Krome Studios

Dispensing with the formalities, *Ty* is a real shocker—a top-qualty critter bash from EA. What was your last game, and how many are you, breaking it down between art, level design, writing, programming, etc.
Krome Currently has over 85 staff. Ty started with a small team of about six people in Jan 01. Then after publisher interest, we grew to about 25 people in September of last year. After signing with EA in Nov '01 and having to ship this title for Fall 02 we have ramped up the team to over 55 People with an additional QA staff of over 10. The rough breakdown of the team is: production, seven; artists, 30; coders, 15; level builders, five; designers two.

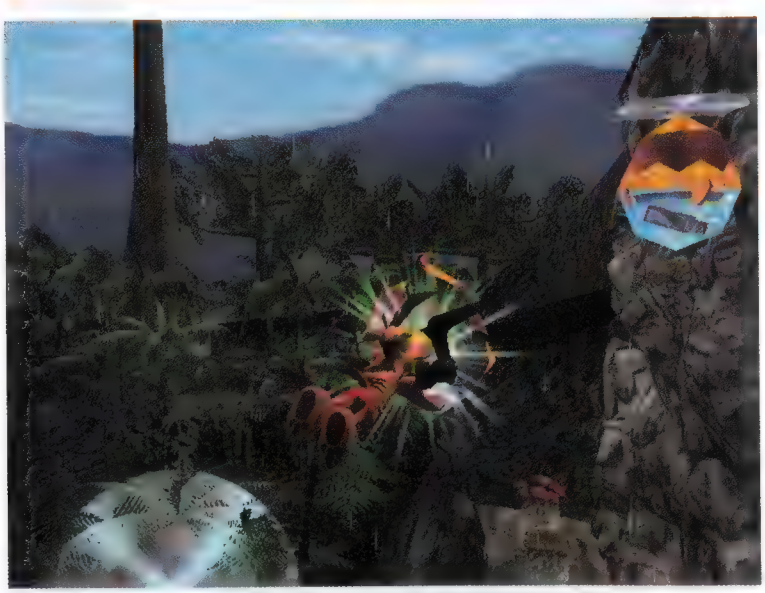
Did EA come to you and say, "Build us a franchise," or did you design a franchise and bring it to EA?
Ty was our own creation, we spent over nine months searching for the right partner and also somebody who would do justice to the character and the title. EA as the largest publisher is a great fit as they are looking to get into this genre and really saw the potential in the title. The relationship has worked extremely well for both partners. We have excellent producers and marketing people working with us at EA.

There are some subtle yet striking effects at work here that I've never seen anything quite like; the way you blend your textures to produce a natural effect, countless layers of blowing grass. Did you develop this engine from the ground up or is it a new take on existing framework? The game is gorgeous.
First, thank you for comments. It is nice to know that all the hard work by both the artists and programmers is showing through. We work hard at pushing our technology to get the best out of the consoles. But we are constantly aware that technology does not make great games. So we always strike a balance between technology and gameplay. But there are certain technological elements that we strove for to differentiate our game from others. We have a great relationship between our artists and programmers and all technology is created with the artists' input. Because after all, technology is the medium to show off great gameplay, artistic and creative abilities. The game engine was started from scratch and is completely original.

Ty is a great character, especially once you begin to amass new Rangs. What drew you to a tiger in an Outback setting? You certainly pull it off. It's not only funny but incredibly well spoken. Can you tell us how you went about recruiting voice talent?
As an Australian company, it was natural to draw inspiration from our own backyard. The Tasmanian Tiger stood out, as he is unique and as is known by the large amount of recent cloning news because it is an extinct animal. Additionally, he is not the common Aussie icon that one would expect, like a kangaroo or crocodile. With the settings, Australia has many unique and beautiful locations. Also Australia is a well recognized and well loved country in general. On the VO front, we take our hats off to EA. They did a great job of recruiting much of the extremely gaming-experienced voice talent.

The game seems to draw from all of the best platforming epics like *Banjo Tooie, Super Mario*, etc. What games in particular fuel your creativity and are you influenced by any developer in particular?
The games we love to play and were we drew a lot of our inspiration from include *Spyro, Banjo*. Obviously there are a lot of other games that we love to play and some of these include *Mario, Soul Calibur, MGS, Grand Turismo, Baldur's Gate*, and *Tony Hawk*. I guess what I am saying is we are a company of gamers and we love to play all sorts of titles. We try to look at the good and bad of all the games we play and try to incorporate that into what we do. I wouldn't say we are influenced by any one developer, because we are all different, but we do admire what Insomniac and Naughty Dog achieved by creating a character and having the vision and passion to take that to market.

Your level design and structure are particularly excellent. Did you do a lot of storyboarding and design work before the development began?
Our level design is fairly well storyboarded but is always subject to tuning and changes if necessary. We constantly prototype gameplay elements through the entire game development process. We don't storyboard gameplay a lot, but we do structure elements and puzzles that we feel are necessary and need to be incorporated into the game. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. We are firm believers in the statement that game design is a living, breathing, evolving process that is not final until the game is in the box.

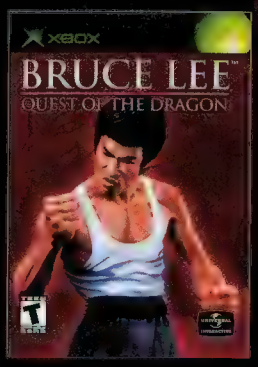


"WE ARE FIRM BELIEVERS IN THE STATEMENT THAT GAME DESIGN IS A LIVING."

HE WAS UNDEFEATED.

HOW WILL YOU CARRY ON HIS LEGACY?

BRUCE LEE™
QUEST OF THE DRAGON



For the first time ever, you can fight as the one and only Bruce Lee. In Quest of the Dragon, motion capture technology authentically recreates more than one hundred of Bruce's Jeet Kune Do moves. Designed exclusively for Xbox, it's an action-packed fighting game where you'll battle hordes of thugs in an epic struggle for survival. Get ready for a fight of legendary proportion.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

XBOX™

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MYSTIC RHYTHMS

Can a dungeon-based RPG that carries both the GameArts and Enix namesakes be anything less than great?

words dave halverson

Somewhere there lies a reason why the legendary RPG series, *Grandia*, has been interrupted to introduce a dungeon RPG into the mix. Perhaps GameArts wanted to further the brand without committing to a three-year project and massive budget. Or perhaps they simply needed a change of scenery after toiling over the same scenario for so long. Whatever the reason, there is good news and bad afoot regarding their first collaboration with Enix—mostly good.

The good news begins as the game opens, with the usual pageantry that GameArts has become famous for, awash with candy-colored villages and fine detail as the story unfolds. The game's marquee player, Evann, voiced by Dean Cain (TV's Superman), is dragged off against his will by the army to help fight in the war against an Elemental Disorder that is tearing the region a new one. Young and accomplished, Evann holds the rank of Ranger and with it the ability Geo Shift, which teleports himself and others in and out of dungeons using the flow of elemental spirits. He's not very keen on his ability to do so, however, nor is he very crazy about being dragged into battle against his will. Just as disgruntled, Colonel Kroitz, the Supreme Commander of the operation to neutralize the elemental disorder (now there's a title), played by Mark Hamill, isn't too fond of Evann's aversion to the military. Nevertheless, these are the circumstances, and as drawn out as they are (you'll wait a good many minutes to actually control Evann), they are nicely portrayed. And then...he runs.

Taking control of Evann, I can't remember when a character was so poorly matched with its surroundings. Evann travels faster than his legs move, which don't seem to bend at the knee nearly enough. The result is an uncharacteristically awkward character from such a highly regarded studio. Everything else seems plucked right out of *Grandia II*, from the character designs to the color palette and architecture, which are all first rate, making Evann's unseemly gate all the more unfortunate. The game's saving grace, however (well, one of many) isn't too far ahead. Once you enter a dungeon, it's worth noting that like most, which are flat, *GX*'s are open and cavernous, with tiers linked by ladders and secret passages rather than steps that disappear into loading screens. This is a major plus, as it deals with an aspect of the genre direly in need of the update. Where *Evolution Worlds* falls short, *Grandia Xtreme* shines brightest. While the dungeons themselves, at this juncture, seem less than technologically on par with current PS2 standards (such simplistic environments should not have a limited line of site), once the battles begin, the game's true colors are exposed. The free-form turn-based battles in *Xtreme*, much like the battles in *GII*, are simply the best of their kind and look fantastic. Further adding to GameArts' already superior system, you can now tailor your party members in more ways then ever, beyond simply letting one AI scheme drive the action. Beyond manual commands, you can select individual strategies like Play Fair, Focus, Go Wild, Meanie, and Safety First, etc. The really good news, however, is that the battles don't load...at all, not for a second. No spinning into place or fading into the field of play. If this is the trade-off for the simplistic nature of the ruins, it's a fair one, especially given the attention to design.

The other factor that *Grandia Xtreme* has going for it—or not, you be the judge—are the celebrity performances. Besides Superman and Luke, songstress Lisa Loeb plays Lutina, commanding officer of an elite Arcadian unit considered a dangerous woman classified as a lethal weapon. Hard to think of LL as a lethal weapon, but okay. Any way you slice it, they've covered the spread with their casting in terms of the generation gap.

Grandia Xtreme is a compelling title in many ways, being the first departure for the series as well as the first GameArts title published by Enix, known for arguably the greatest RPG series ever created, *Dragon Warrior*. Many an RPG gamer likely has his stare fixed its way, hopefully by the time the game streets in September, it will live up to their expectations.

Xtreme doing what it does best. The best turn-based combat system around struts its stuff.

PS2 **Grandia Xtreme** preview

publisher: enix

available: september

A big fan of dungeon games, it's a shame there are so few great ones. Perhaps *Xtreme* will change all that, and at the same time, launch *Grandia* anew.

I LIKE TUROK

Reinvented for the new trio of power consoles, Turok goes back to the future to face his destiny.

words dave halverson

The fourth installment in the *Turok* series, *Evolution*, is a prequel, taking players back to the origins of the story as two nemeses, Tal' Set and Captain Tobias Bruckner, are sucked through a time rift from Texas 1886 into The Lost Lands, where instead of buffalo, the dinosaurs roam, along with Tal' Set's destiny...

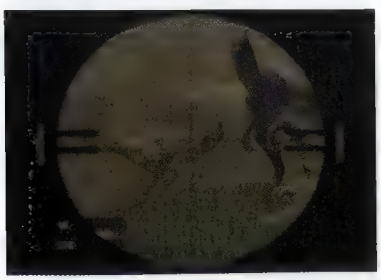
With each passing chapter in the *Turok* saga, one thing can be said: the team has always strived to innovate rather than rest on their laurels. Doing this with a fog line just on the horizon was one thing, doing this on Xbox (PS2, and GameCube) would be another, so they just said, "f---k it," and reinvented the wheel. Turok is still a first-person action game, but Tal' Set has a brand new satchel of tricks up his leathers to go with the deep, intertwined story.

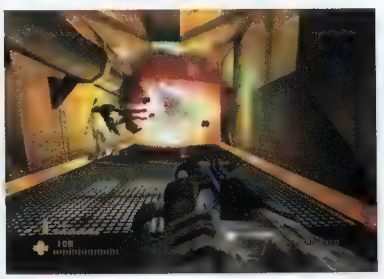
The plan is to knock players dead with visuals so real they'll need bug spray—produce AI so disgustingly realistic they'll buy a first aid kit too—and make it sound so damn real they'll whiz on the family sofa. Turok rides a pterodactyl, too, and brandishes 30 weapons (including the all-new Gravity Disrupter Beam, Swarm Bore and Baby Nuke). Of course all of this is easier said than done.

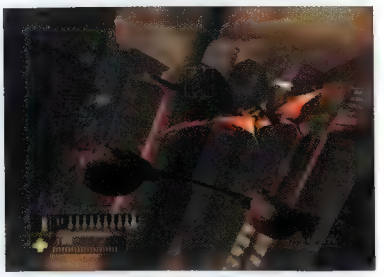
I received the game just before press time, so was only able to squeeze in a couple hours of gameplay for this "hands-on" preview (have I mentioned how much I hate the phrase "hands-on," by the way? If not, I'm officially doing so now). A few things are immediately evident as you assail the dense foliage. The designers have definitely created something special in terms of the environments and AI, with the by-product being the inability to charge through the game. Rather, you'll need to think like you really could be eaten or shot at any moment. This is a fantastic new wrinkle in the franchise. Stealth is going to play a major role in *Evolution*; and as for the sound, mission accomplished, although the grunts emitting from the baboons deeply disturbed me. I can't say that I'm wild about platforming with the inability to see my feet, though—something I thought for sure would make the overhaul. Turok is still a floating arm without a body. That might be okay for a frag-fest, but for an action adventure laden with climbing and jumping—no; give the guy a body already. Not that I won't love every minute of it, but a torso would certainly heighten the realism. Check back with me next month for more revealing commentary about '02's most ambitious FPS adventure.

"...'02'S MOST AMBITIOUS FPS ADVENTURE."

Where's a pair of legs when you need them?







PS2 GC XB **Turok Evolution** preview

The prehistoric stylings of Acclaim's Austin Studios spread their wings, looking to continue the tradition of FPS excellence into the next era of gaming.

WILD WILD WEST

Contrail returns to craft this third chapter in the peculiarly Western-influenced Wild Arms.

words brady fiechter

Years ago, a propitious company named Sony made the PlayStation and decided that nearly every game in Japan must be offered to we underrepresented Americans, including those silly role-playing games that just weren't supposed to capture appeal in our limited market. *Wild Arms* was among the first, surprised with its success, and essentially laid the tracks for the RPG train to run nonstop. A sequel and gaming-world face lift later, we're now onto *Wild Arms 3*, and the game appears initially to be what you'd expect: improved graphics, sound, battle system and...verdict's out on the story, which starts off in some very clunky dialogue territory.

But shame on me for being critical of an RPG story when I've barely even been through the prologue.

Instead, I'll praise the visual style, a richly saturated canvas of sunset colors and pencil-sketched texturing. The peculiar old-West tone that's weaved into the traditional RPG aesthetic is warm and inviting, distinguishing the game from the masses. Borrowing from the last two games in the series, the battle system retains the ARM attacks while branching out into advanced attack combos and summons. If the game plays as well as it looks, we starving RPG folks will finally have something other than *FFX* to immerse ourselves in.

PS2 **Wild Arms 3** **preview**

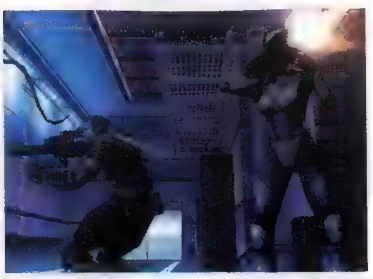
available: **october**

Game's early, but there's little doubt it will please those who've followed the series form its 32-bit beginning.

JOIN THE FACTION

A nicely improved sequel to a solid original, Red Faction 2 is yet another killer FPS waiting in the wings.

words brady fiechter



Big guns (and powerful and loud) make big explosions and destroy stuff.

Red Faction was one of those sneaky games that no one paid much attention to until it finally shipped and kicked ample ass. It was a bit inelegant and experimental, yet showed signs of skill and invention, and the enjoyable story elements and superb level structure pushed it into the top shelf of the console FPS.

This sequel is immediately familiar: the hero's movement is still just right, the levels carry the same basic tone as *Red Faction*, the action feels similarly staged. But when it comes to the details, the game is finely improve. The visual integrity has been stepped up, with excellent lighting and better texture quality adding to the appeal, and more effects have been dumped in to inject the explosions and weapon disgarges with much more force.

What separated *RF* from the typically durable FPS construct was the Geo-Mod technology, which is a fancy word that describes your ability to blow holes in walls, destroy pillars and towers, and pretty much level any solid object in your path. In *RF2*, it is less of a visual enhancement and more of a dynamic to alter the course of gameplay. Even if this early yet already much-improved angle to the action doesn't deliver on the team's ambitions, it's a blast shredding more than just human targets. Every FPS in the future needs to find a way to incorporate it into the mix.

"RED FACTION 2 IS FINELY IMPROVED."

PS2 **Red Faction 2** **preview**

publisher: **THQ**

available: **fall**

With improvements from gameplay to visuals to sound and level structure, Red Faction 2 demonstrates how to do a sequel.

The ultimate off-road driving adventure is heading to the Nintendo GameCube™ this summer! With five massive levels, a huge new arsenal of countermeasures and split-screen multiplayer action for up to four players, working for an elite band of smugglers has never been more exciting or dangerous. Make the drop, hit the nitro boost and get across the border before all hell breaks loose!

SMUGGLER'S RUN

WARZONES

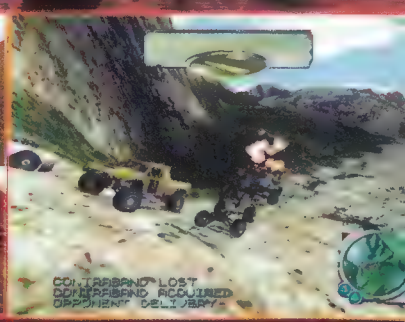
IN STORES NOW!

Set in the world's most dangerous warzones, dodge minefields and enemy cross-fire to deliver the goods.

Huge selection of off-road vehicles with reflection mapping and meticulous detail get you where you need to be.

FOUR PLAYER!

Daring missions including aerial drops and border chases take you through an immersive story line.



TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE™

www.rockstargames.com/smugglersrun

Angel Studios

R*

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RISING SUN

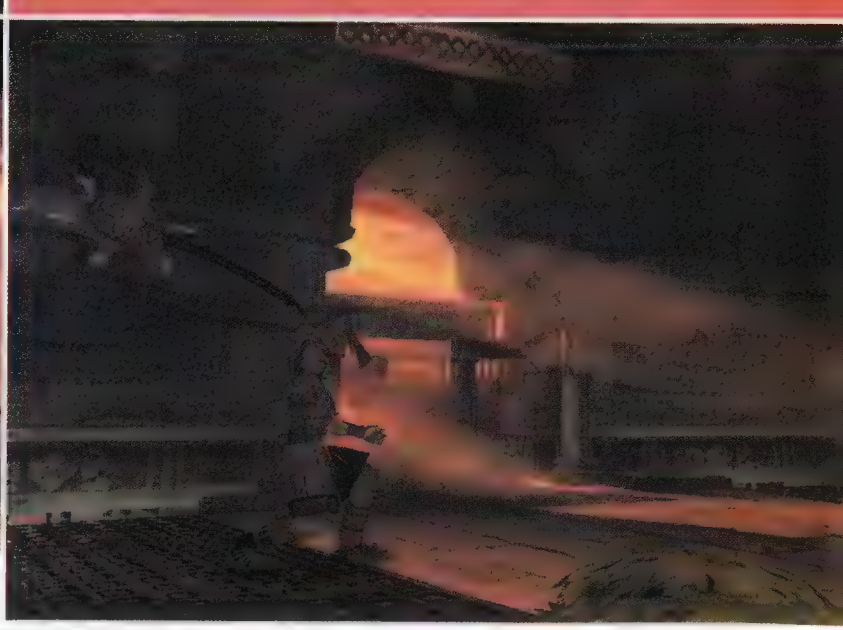
Tecmo travels way, way back to the stone ages of 8-bit to breathe life back into the mighty Rygar.

First thing that comes to mind when recalling the NES classic, *Rygar*: those gorgeous, blindingly vibrant sun-soaked skies! And now, here we are, fighting currents of water, casting shadows over reflected surfaces, enjoying suns that seem to give off a tangible warmth, no longer having to laugh at how easily our fertile 8-bit minds were fed. It's a perfect time for the rebirth of *Rygar*.

For the masses who might be lucky to even pronounce this game correctly, don't fret your miseducation of the oldschool; this update is its own game, with high adventure and the kind of action that the modern gamer eats up. Rygar's basic tool for survival is the Diskarmor, an arcane razor shield created by gods that extends like a yo-yo, allowing Rygar to kill, defend, lift to higher ground. With over 30 distinct movements to the weapon, the game does not intend on offering a limited mode of action, attempting instead to draw on a cinematic, richly immersing quest for its appeal. Tecmo rocks.

The hardcore folks will likely recognize some subtle Rygar touches.

"IT'S THE PERFECT TIME FOR THE REBIRTH OF RYGAR."



I don't remember the NES version looking this amazingly good.

PS2

Rygar

preview

available: december

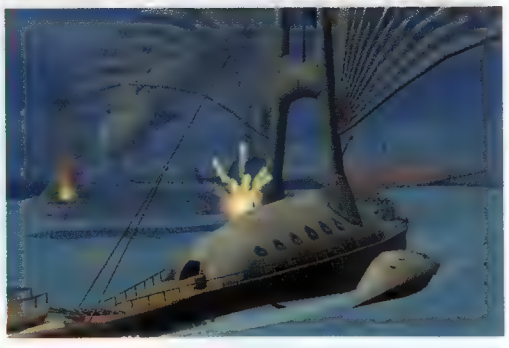
Tecmo digs deep and far, unearthing an ancient NES treasure. Finally.

THE BIG ENGINE THAT COULD

An independently financed epic, *Haven* has been the dream project of developer Traveller's Tales. This is your first peek at their quest to blend gaming genres.

words tom ham

Haven may just be the game Midway needs to makes us forget about the flat Legion: The Legend of Excalibur.



UK-based Traveller's Tales has certainly made a name for themselves as one of the premier game developers for licensed properties, mainly known for their Disney products like *Buzz Lightyear*, *Toy Story Racer* and *A Bug's Life*, T-Tales has also worked on *Sonic 3D* as well as the recent *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex*. So when I heard they were developing a completely original title on their own, I was more than intrigued.

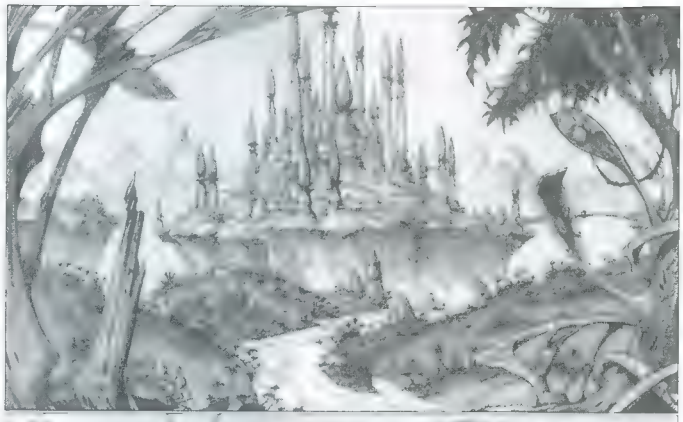
"It was the game I always wanted to play," explains Dave Burton, president of Traveller's Tales. "I came up with the idea seven years ago, but the technology wasn't up to the challenge. I wanted to give the player a feeling of surprise at the scale and content of our game at every turn. I wanted the player to think he had seen the scope of the game, only to find out the world was ten times bigger than they thought, and then ten times bigger again and again." After checking out a demo of *Haven: Call of the King*, I would have to agree with Mr. Burton—the game is absolutely gigantic. Being in development for three years with a crew of 30 or so working diligently on it, *Haven* is truly something special.

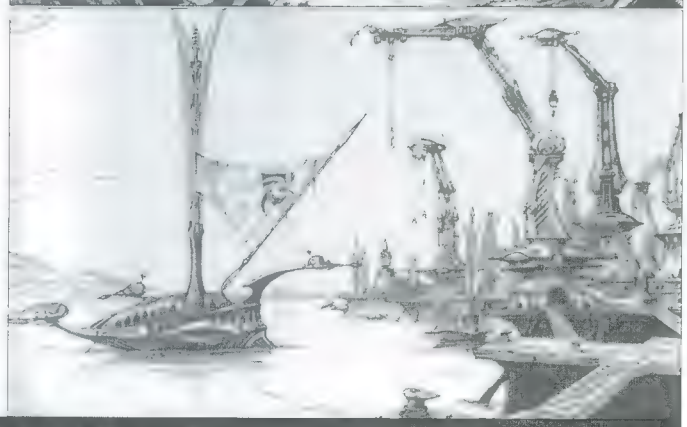
For a game that has been in the thoughts of its creators for seven years, you can imagine how epic the story is going to be. At its heart, *Haven* is an adventure game, so players can expect to do quite a bit of exploring and puzzle solving. When he is awakened by the "Golden Voice," Haven embarks on a quest to free his people from slavery and defeat the evil Lord Vetch. To prove his worth, he must also battle it out, *Gladiator*-style, in warrior training grounds. Only then is he ready to recover a relic that will lead him to the "Golden Voice." "The game we wanted to produce needed an involving storyline to hold together all the different elements," continues Burton. "I draw inspiration for the story from established 'moral truths'—determination, trust and faith are counterbalanced by deception, temptation and betrayal. These are the backbones to many a great story and I have relied on these in our storyline."

But what is going to make people take notice of *Haven* is the game engine itself. Aside from the breathtaking visuals, smooth animations and fantastic lighting effects, the way T-Tales has incorporated different types of gameplay into one game is absolutely brilliant. On one level, the player will have to platform jump to reach a goal. Another level may have you driving a vehicle (the game will have both land- and air-based vehicles) through enemy-infested areas. There are even shooter elements. And how T-Tales managed to put it all together in one cohesive package is truly remarkable. "I always wanted to create a game that would release the player from the traditional confines of levels, and would allow them to play virtually any of the game genres they had encountered before," says Burton. "This would allow a new genre of games to be created, one that would test the game-playing skills of the user beyond what would have been asked of them before, and would provide a much more varied and interesting gameplay experience."

My only concern was, could the PS2 handle of this technology? Yes, it is a powerful machine. Yes, it can do many great things. But with such an ambitious title, was the overall vision of the developers cut short? Did T-Tales bite off more than they could chew? "The PlayStation 2 was *just* powerful enough to pull off this game at 60 frames per second, but it did manage it," explains Burton. "We have now established what we see as the 'ultimate gameplay engine'—that is to say, it allows the player to go from the smallest gameplay item in a cave, to flying around planets in space. You can't really step beyond that kind of scale, you can only improve the visual quality and the range of freedom allowed in this new gameplay universe. As the machines get faster and faster, it allows us to add more and more detail to this universe. All of the tools that we have created have been designed with this in mind. For instance, at the touch of a key we can double the resolution of the planet textures. The tool will regenerate the planet with all the extra detail, and it is no more work for the artists. We are only limited by the power of the console the game is to be run on, and not the amount of time it would take an artist to create the textures, as the textures are created by fractal mathematics—e.g. computer generated. So the entire *Haven* engine is scaleable, and will be improved upon with every release of a new console." And yes, you can expect *Haven* to appear on the Xbox and GameCube as well.

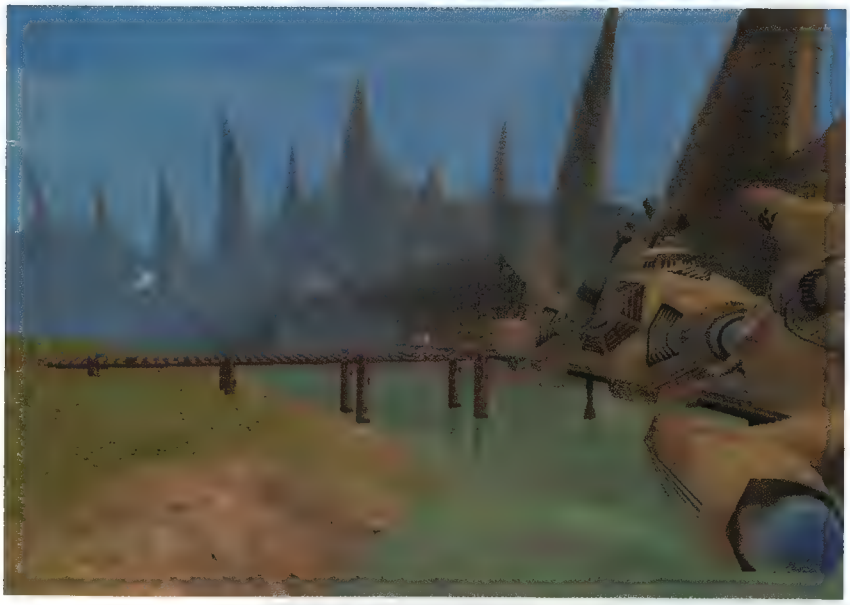
And hopefully, if things go well, this isn't the last we will see of *Haven*. "*Call of the King* is the first of a larger three-part story," concludes Burton. "The second part will rely on players having come to grips with the multi-genre nature of the *Haven* series, and will throw the player straight into an epic battle to turn the tide on the forces of evil. The third part will be a real step forward. It is being designed to run on the next generation of machines and will take the multi-genre concept to its ultimate extension and also include online capabilities, but I don't want to go into details at the moment. If people enjoy the universe of Haven, there is also a prequel scripted that tells of the downfall of Haven's ancestors. We will tell



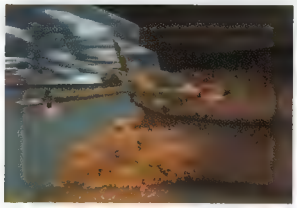


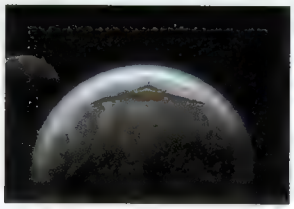
"IN DEVELOPMENT FOR THREE YEARS, HAVEN IS TRULY SOMETHING SPECIAL."

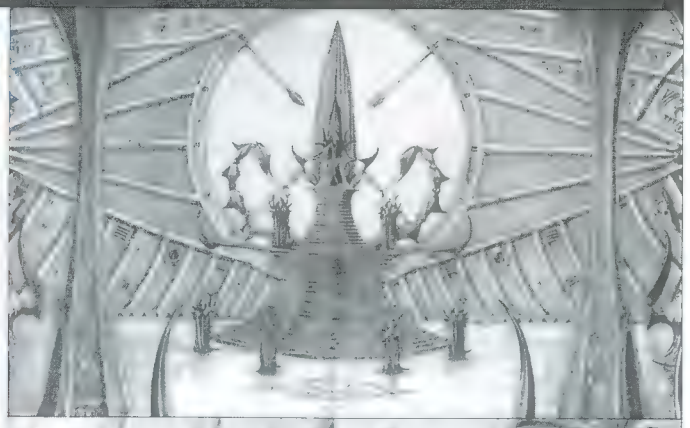
THE WORLDS OF HAVEN

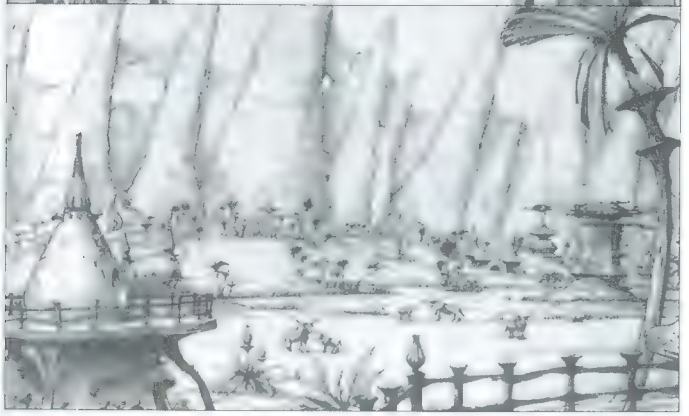


The environments are fantastically rich and visually exciting.









PS2

Haven: Call of the King

preview

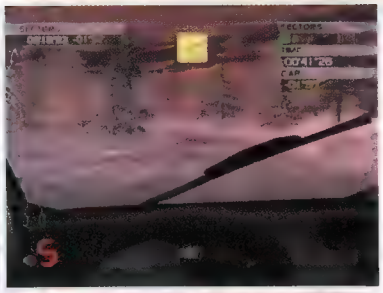
available: tbd

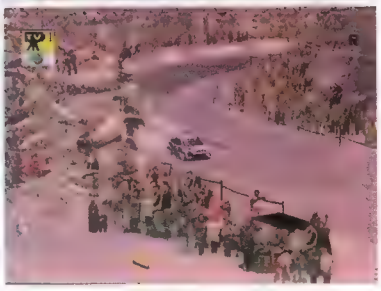
T-Tales has already proven that they're a more than capable third-party developer. The true test will be if they can do just as well with game that's all their own. So far: no complaints.

DRIVEN

Eden Studios once again pulls out all the stops, creating the definitive Rally experience, yet again.

words dave halverson





Looks real, huh? Feels real too...

Thus far, in its illustrious run, the *V-Rally* franchise has steered its way into some four million homes. How can a game that essentially relies on improving on the same concept over and over possibly generate those types of numbers? That's the same question I keep asking myself with each passing version, the last of which I still consider among the best ever, *Test Drive V-Rally* for Dreamcast. The soundtrack, by Sin, had something to do with that, as music is an essential part of any racer, but overall it just kicked so much ass that it was hard to imagine how it would ever be topped. Playing *VR3*, that question was quickly addressed. What, do these people drive these cars to work or what? Talk about dialed in.

Eden Studios literally plants your arse in the driver's seat, with one of six cameras giving you a pinch of the dash, your hands on the wheel and the most realistic thru-the-windshield view ever: gradual dirt accumulation, wipers, cracks, smearing mud, you name it—you are in the car. The courses themselves also smash all before them, exhibiting the most dense, lushly populated roadways imaginable, complete with scurrying spectators and nary a visible seam. The physics and collision (with real-time deformation) are also new and improved and as usual, the absolute finest rally cars are at your disposal, each assembled using a walloping 15,000 polygons. Our preview version ran silent, sans music, and had a hint of clipping, but otherwise, *VR3* is looking like it will once again reinvent itself enough to give *Colin McRae* a run for his money.

"...YOU ARE IN THE CAR."

PS2 **V-Rally 3** — **preview**

developer: eden s...

available: q3

If the final touches smooth out the few wrinkles, we'll have ourselves a rally great game—one of two slated for Q3. Time to get dirty!

GETAWAY WITH MURDER

A skillfully crafted game with a severe adult sensibility. Are we walking too close to the edge?

words brady fiechter

"DISREGARD THE PEDESTRIANS IF YOU LIKE."

It was a perverse kick to rip out spinal columns and decapitate and dismember and crush human bodies in the once-shocking *Mortal Kombat*. It was reprehensible to the parents and the media. Nintendo balked, colored the blood green, cleaning it up for the kiddie consumption. Well done: bodies pop, but at least they don't squirt red! All was safe in the world again.

Or was it? Let's not disregard *Doom*, with the monsters posing as chunky sprites that disintegrated from the blast of the BFG (big fu***ng gun)—the "murder simulator"—to the dysfunctional youth in training.

Disturbing stuff. Heinous stuff.

Whatever. Ignorance, misinformation and intellectual bankruptcy infect our society. Are we to be surprised any more by the ubiquitous outcries? Would you be surprised if I was now starting to join some of the screaming? If I said we're now threatening to go too far, flirting with violence, sex and adult themes in a distasteful manor?

A question was posed to Shinji Mikami, director of the deliciously grizzly *Resident Evil* series, games that are artfully, effectively and creatively structured: why no more wanton use of the shotgun to shred the zombie heads in close range? Because the game is now too real, he responds, and it is no longer disturbing and gross, but unnecessary and excessive to, at will, blow brain matter into the walls and floors. Oh, so my description's a bit exaggerated? Perhaps I speak more of what is about to come than what we are currently experiencing. Who will be the one to take advantage of increasingly advanced modeling tools—from which lifelike monsters, and humans, will be drawn with incredulous accuracy—to form the coolest exit wound from a sniper shot, to animate the gurgling choke of a knife to the throat.

This isn't *Mortal Kombat* any more. This isn't 16-bit or 32-bit anymore. This isn't even last year. Games are different. They are art, disarming realism, intense re-creations of reality and bold imaginings of pure fantasy.

One of Sony's biggest titles this year is *The Getaway*, a natural and inevitable extension of the *GTA3* craze. You've read all about it, been told how many levels are in it, how neat it is that London is strikingly replicated, how the cars look great and the action is severe and the theme mature. The game holds technical mastery and solid ideas, is well staged and ambitiously executed. It's a big project for Sony, and wears its first-party luster well. People will love it.

It also demands the question: are we now going too far? I won't answer that; maybe I already have. But you decide what is extreme.

The Getaway's set-up: your wife is murdered, child's in danger, and you burn to seek revenge, chasing the killers through the crowded London streets. If your vehicle receives too much damage, jump out and hijack a random vehicle to continue pursuit (the urgency and smart design deserve credit). Disregard the pedestrians if you like: there's no room for consequence, even if the game is built around cinematic drama and the intention to establish a working reality. It's real, convincing, emotional, involving, and you get to run down as many people as you like, watching them crunch as they flip over your hood.

Before the chase, there's more profanity being flung around than in all the games combined since the beginning of *Pac-Man*. These are British mobsters. They talk with that hip marble-mouth garble that you can't understand, because it's hip to have British accents that are incomprehensible. A prude might complain of the cursing; a critic might complain of contrived dialogue that is wrapped in vitriol just for the sake of now having the greenlight to do so.

The Getaway will probably be a kick-ass game, filled with exciting chases, lacerating shootouts and awesome settings. You might be thrilled by the escape. Or you might pass in unease, preferring, like me, to play games like *Medal of Honor* instead, where World War II is our reality and the realism is just as impactive. And then I have to ask, Is one any different from the other?

PS2 **The Getaway** **preview**

available: October

I'm not throwing out a verdict on The Getaway—it's barely playable—but just my thoughts on what it represents for the future of gaming.

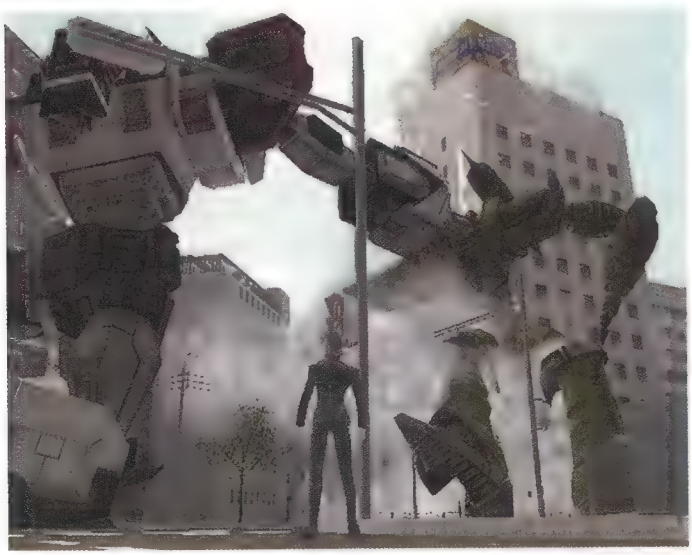
MR. ROBOTO

Enix goes heavy metal, mecha style!

words dave halverson

If you can imagine standing in the middle of your city, controlling a gigantic robot 40 stories high, weighing 70-plus tons, via remote, taking on another gigantic robot that would really like to eat the city, well, then you're weird. But hey, Gigantor fans everywhere take heed; Enix is bringing this phenomenal formula stateside with *RAD (Robot Alchemic Drive.)* A similar game, *Robot Dandy*, was released in Japan back in '99 for the PS, but never made its way to America—a crying shame, the game was incredible—so now *RAD* will begin to make amends. The team responsible for Dandy (formerly with Human Entertainment) has since formed a splinter group, Sandlot, and are now at the helm of their second giant robot epic. With the power of the PS2 at their disposal and the support of Enix, a company that knows how to market anime-inspired games, it should be effortless from here. Speaking of anime-inspired, *RAD*'s giant robos are designed by Yamane Kimitoshi, mech designer for *Cowboy BeBop*, only the most stylized anime show in a decade, so the cards would seem stacked in their favor. It's hard to portray just how awe-inspiring *RAD* is, switching between human mode, positioning yourself, and robot mode, actually manipulating tons of steel, with realistic physics perfectly matched to the Dual Shock. When these things fall, they do millions of dollars in damage, and people aren't immune to being squashed like bugs. Winning battles is one thing, winning and not leaving a disaster area in your wake is another. Your job as a Handler is to not only save the city from the alien onslaught, but from yourself as well. If *RAD*'s story mode is anything like *Dandy*'s, this is going to be one to remember.

"IT'S HARD TO PORTRAY JUST HOW AWE-INSPIRING..."



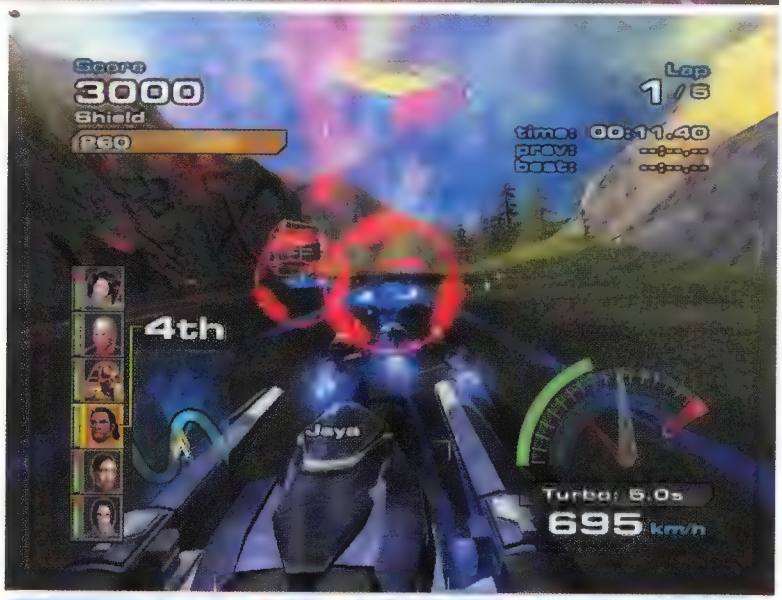
Chaos, destruction, crumbling, explosions, crushing and general moments of people squashing.

PS2 **Robot Alchemic Drive** — preview

developer: sandlot
publisher: enix
available: fall

One of the freshest design ideas in a long time will finally get the respect it deserves. Just remember, the bigger they are...

MECHANICAL MUSIC



Would it be pretentious of me, after playing *Quantum Redshift* for only a few hours, to say that it is now my favorite racing game ever? How about that it's the best-looking I've ever seen, or better yet, reason enough alone to buy an Xbox? Well, you may think so, until you lay eyes on it, and then after a few hours playing it (once someone's pried the controller out of your hand) you'll most assuredly agree. First off, let me just say, the Xbox is just scary. The thing is a beast. The visual punch from this game would send Iron Mike to his grave: bump mapping you simply will not believe, little drops of rain that look as though they're on your side of the screen, and environmental effects that make everything else pale in comparison, whisk by like they're par for the course—just another day in polygon land. I could have used a dribble cup the first two hours I played it. In addition, when Curly Monster said "role-playing elements," they weren't kidding. Rivals and allies alike speak between races, via full-blown animated character models, each in their own language! They are also clearly defined in each race. Beyond idle threats, your nemesis will challenge you to a one-on-one between leagues, linked to any number of story lines, and once defeated, they become yours to partake on an entirely new story arc.

Beyond story depth, the game boasts five levels of difficulty (up to Redshift, which must be insane), three types of mods, and a three-tiered attack system that adds a new dynamic to combat-equipped racers. *QR* does play a lot like *WipEout*, which is great, except weapons factor in less here, *WipEout*'s courses (which are great) can't compare, and these vehicles operate on pivots, sucking in wind for aerodynamic variables in the air and water. The tracks are also wider, and laden with a variety of paths and strategic lines. The game also derives more from environmental conditions, to the extent that I simply can't explain it. If you own an Xbox, you simply must buy this game, and if you don't, well, get one. We held the book to the very last minute to squeeze this hands-on (there's that damn expression again) preview in, so you'll have to stay tuned for the review (and hopefully a lot more) until next month. Not like this isn't a glaring endorsement, we'll just be looking for more excuses to cover it, and ask CM a bunch of questions. BTW, if you have a Wega...oh, dude.

"...MY FAVORITE RACING GAME EVER?"

Can I say enough about bump mapping? No, I can't.

XB **Quantum Redshift** preview

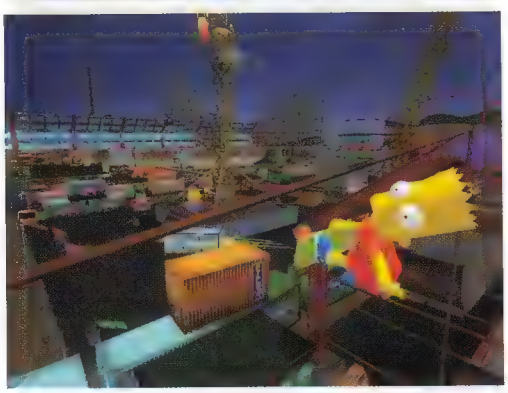
developer:
publisher:
available: fall

Curly Monsters has obviously taken great care in molding the Xbox equivalent to WipEout. To say the least, they've made their point.

DOGTOWN SPRINGFIELD

The Simpsons park their cars and grab their boards.

words dave halverson



Betcha never thought you'd see this in a skateboarding game...

In their mission to cover every avenue of pop-culture gaming with a coating of the Simpsons, EA's next stop is not, surprisingly, skateboarding, and if you ask me, they couldn't have chosen a better platform. Although good, I could live without *Road Rage*; as much as I dig the Simpsons, the whole Crazy Taxi vibe eluded me. But Marge and Krusty busting out the sick moves...now this I can get into. The game plays the parody card, of course, but there's also a tourney in town with a whopping 99 bucks up for grabs, so the gloves are off. Springfield has been transformed into a giant skate park to do your bidding and, well, you can imagine the rest.

Execution-wise we've all been down this ramp before: grinds, ollies, flips, and grabs occupy the button cluster with spins on the shoulders, along with the usual variables. So if you're down with the T-Hawks of the world, you'll be launching Bart into the wild blue in no time. The usual spattering of modes are here too: head-to-head, Free Skate, Trick Contest, Skillz School, and even skateboard h-o-r-s-e (okay, so a little more than the usual).

The game still has some tuning issues; tight turns and aiming are haphazard, and the framerate needs mucho assistance, but given the simplistic nature of the game's architecture, it's almost assured that 60-frames and spot-on control are imminent. If all else fails, Simpsons die-hards will still get-off on carving up 10 areas of Springfield to the smooth sounds of their favorite cast members, including Bart, Homer, Marge, Krusty, Professor Frink, Nelson, Otto, Lisa, and more. I know there's a witty Simpsons-ism to plug-in here, but it escapes me, so, er—bye.

"NOW THIS I CAN GET INTO..."

PS2 **Simpsons Skateboarding** **preview**

available: Summer

Ten bucks says The Simpsons go from here to either surfing or a cart racer. But wouldn't another Bart-tastic adventure be grand?

TAKING FLIGHT

Digital Illusions' innovative *Battlefield 1942* takes the first-person shooter to new heights—literally.

words jon m gibson

Talk about dropping the bomb on the competition: Through use of an amazing proprietary engine (Refractor 2), *Battlefield 1942* allows you to do just that while at the throttle of a powerhouse Bomber. The idea seems quite relative in the landscape of WWII; it's the ability to bail out of the plane, open your parachute, land behind enemy lines, and ignite some nasty German infantrymen that truly astounds.

It's the latest evolution of the first-person shooter, allowing players to indulge in much more than the typical frag-fest. There's a roundup of 35 vehicles to use in this reasonably authentic Axis and Allies clash, ranging from jeeps, ironclad tanks, and virile fighter jets. Basically, the overall concept of *1942* adheres to the action of *Halo* speeder sequences or even *Tribes*—but here, vehicles extend throughout the entire game and are a prerequisite for victory.

The battlefield: 16 levels, all steeped in historical fact (Normandy, Kursk, Midway—it's *all* recognizable for the warfare buff). And even for the uninitiated, the landscapes are as epic as any of Spielberg's maritime tales—there's plenty of interactive living space. Lush, vast expanses of land—propped with the remains of assaulted cities, battered airstrips and fallen soldiers—are present in each bullet-happy free-for-all.

Keep in mind, though, gameplay is focused primarily on multiplayer action—up to 64 soldiers can go into battle via broadband (a dial-up connection couldn't possibly handle *1942*'s immense combat engine). However, some fancy AI specs are installed for players who don't want to burn the midnight oil online; there's absolutely no scripting in the single-player mode, providing a completely unique experience during every battle.

Either way, *Battlefield 1942* plops you in the middle of WWII frenzy like no game before.

"THE LATEST EVOLUTION OF THE FIRST PERSON SHOOTER"

Take hold of the throttle, spin the steering wheel or simply run with the two legs that you were born with—your options are plentiful.

PC **XB** **Battlefield 1942** **preview**

Battlefield 1942 advances the online warfare experience ten-fold. It's by no means a run-of-the-mill FPS; you quite possibly will never get bored with all the built-in gameplay options.

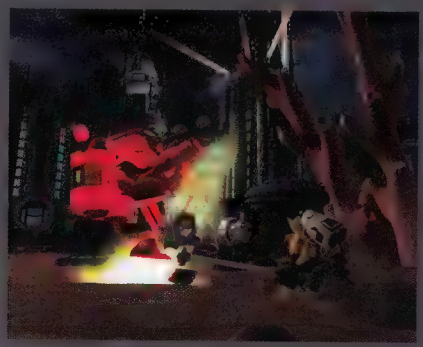
NUTS & BOLTS

Ambitious and playful, inventive and endlessly addictive, this amalgamation of several genres soars.

words brady fiechter

INSOMNIAC GAMES

"WE'RE VERY PROUD OF WHAT WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CREATE." - *TED PRICE*

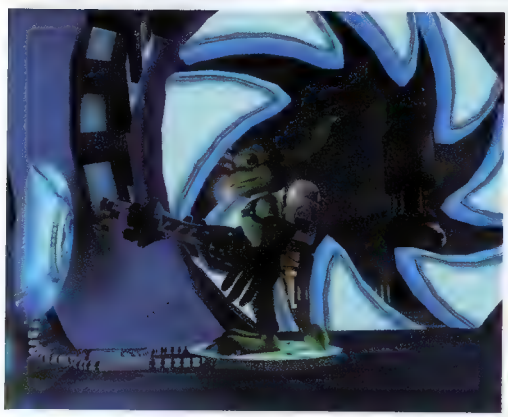


How about those detailed animations? Those gorgeous environments? The amazing architecture...

Words like "revolutionary," "gold-standard enormous" and "benchmark" tend to creep into conversations when Insomniac touts its ambitious *Ratchet & Clank*. "We walk the walk ... We're very proud of what we've been able to create so far," says Insomniac president Ted Price.

The game contains so many riches in the first few levels alone, you excitedly wonder how such strong resonance will be sustained throughout the entire adventure. There's no denying *Ratchet & Clank*'s awesome visual presence, but beyond the raw technical magic—the level of detail is striking—is a wonderfully appealing canvas of inviting colors, cleverly imagined creatures and fantastically constructed worlds. Because the action is not contained in one homogenous world, instead moving across an array of alien planets, ships and cities, there is a freedom for the artists to invest an entirely distinct look and feel to each location. From the beginning, Insomniac desired a game that would be uncommonly visually diverse.

This variety also carries over to the gameplay. An emphasis is being placed on creating an experience that does not draw from one dominating idea, with several influences working together to create a much more engaging reality. There's a lot of action and platforming, a little RPG, big adventure and exploration, storytelling and cinematics and emotional pull. Travel takes you to chat with characters, make deals for upgrades and repairs, buy weapons and gadgets. Around 35 gadgets and weapons will eventually find their way into your willing hands, playing a personalized role in forming effective progress. Ultimately, Insomniac believes *R&C* will offer you a virtual universe that feels organic and alive, not scripted and disjointed. "The world environment, the world [feel], is so important to us," says Price. And by the terrific look of things, top-tier gamemaking is important as well.



PS2

Ratchet & Clank

preview

developer: **ins**

publisher: **sony**

available: **november**

Insomniac has been honing its skills with Spyro; but this is no Spyro, and now the real magic is out.

SCRAPPING METAL

It's high time the mech fighter was rediscovered, and who better to reawaken it than the creators of *Jade Cocoon* and *Super Magnetic Neo*.

words dave halverson

"...POISED TO BECOME THE QUINTESSENTIAL MECH BATTLER OF THE 128-BIT ERA."

Games like Phantom Crash rely heavily on ambience. Looks like Genki is well aware.

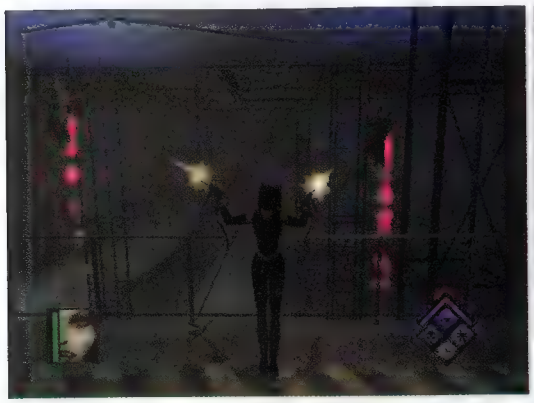
XB

Phantom Crash: blue sky brings tears

preview

available: **october**

The most excited I've been about a mech-based vs. fighter in as long as I care to remember. Phantagram's first U.S. release will likely be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

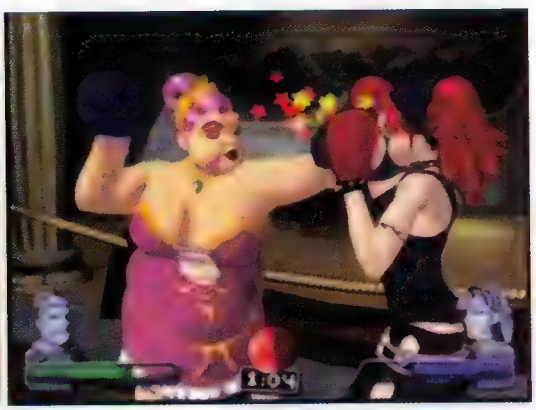


BloodRayne

PS2 GC XB

developer: terminal reality/ publisher: majesco / available: oct

Majesco's first stab at a bona fide franchise is looking bloody good as Bloodrayne's appetite for Nazi's continues to take shape, and what a shape it is. We'll go in-depth next

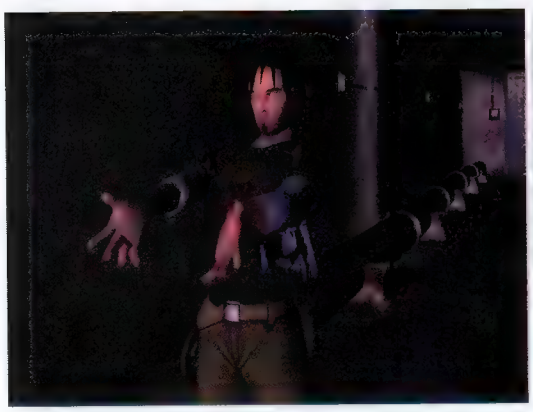


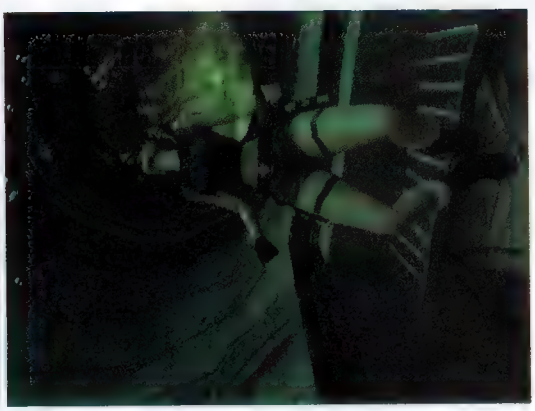
Black and Bruised

PS2 XB

developer: digital fiction / publisher: majesco / available: fall

Newly introduced *Black and Bruised* appears to be the next evolution of the *Punch Out* aesthetic. Will pummeling older fat women go over big? Okay, at least admit that was funny.



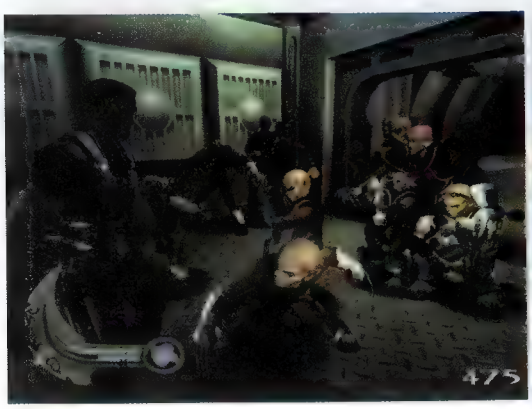


Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness

PS2

developer: eidos / publisher: eidos / available: nov.

The latest screens of Lara's latest escapade... Will the angel of darkness win us over or leave us wanting? Lovely Lara has never let us down.



Blade II

PS2 XB

developer: mucky foot / publisher: activision / available: sep.

We'll take an in-depth look at Activision's impressive-looking movie adaptation, *Blade II*, in the October issue. Until then, here's a couple of screens to tide you over.

Panzer Dragoon Orta

XB

developer: smilebit / publisher: sega / available: sep.

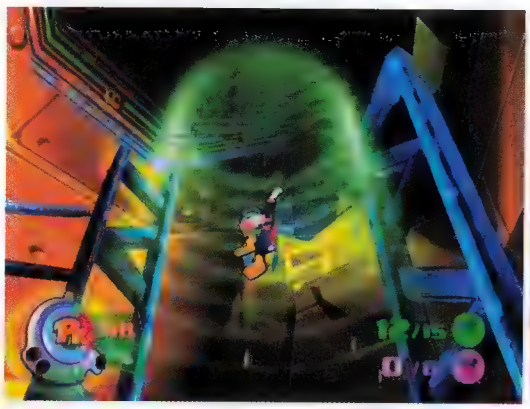
The wait is nearly over for Smilebit's highly anticipated *Panzer Dragoon* sequel. Next month, we'll bring you an in-depth **play** report, so you know what to do.

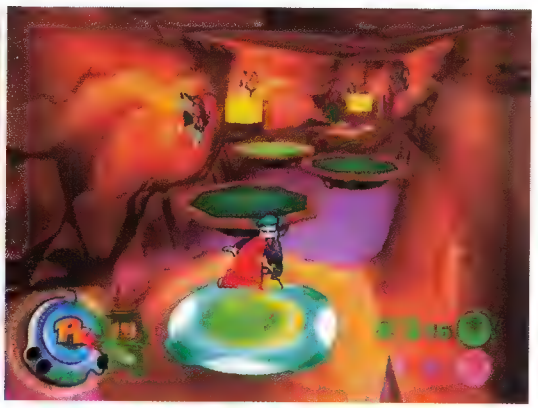
Disney's PK

PS2 GC

developer: ubi soft / publisher: ubi soft / available: fall

Spawned in 1968, the Italian comic featuring Donald Duck as the super hero PK, is finally making its American debut as a PS2/GC platformer!





Ape Escape 2

PS2

developer: scej / publisher: tba/ available: tba

One of the most anticipated PS2 sequels, *Ape Escape 2* is not coming from to the U.S. via Sony. Whoever does grab it is in for some serious monkey business.

Super Monkey Ball 2

GC

developer: amusement vision / publisher: sega / available: sep.

Super Monkey Ball 2 is shaping up to be a text-book sequel, with more of everything that made the first game so much fun. More mini-games, more stages, what more do you want?

HERE COMES THE SUN

Super Mario Sunshine is finally here, and not only is it better than you imagine, it is better than you can imagine.

words michael hobbs

Words escape me at the moment. I've just come away from a marathon session of *Super Mario Sunshine*, and I am very nearly at a loss to describe the experience. I had no idea that the game would not only meet my expectations of being a modern classic, but would exceed them. Put simply, this is probably the best videogame I've ever played.

What's most remarkable to me about *Super Mario Sunshine* is its staggering consistency. There is a level of execution here that I've just not seen before. Only *Metal Gear Solid 2* is in the same league with regards to its almost fetishistic attention to detail, but the focus and purpose of that game is very narrow. Mario has the same attention to detail, but it's in this big, free world that you can run around in and interact with in surprising ways.

Indeed, I'll never forget my first hour or so with the game. I sat there dumbstruck, smashed deep into my couch, Wavebird in hand, mouth agape at what I was experiencing. Such delight! Such discovery!

I enter the first world, and I'm really not even playing the game. At this point, I could really care less about the level objective. I'm having far too much fun just running around, learning about the layout of the level and what Mario can do within it. How many games are so good that you can sit there entertaining yourself just by manipulating the character? Not since *Super Mario 64* (big surprise) have I enjoyed such a pleasure. It's a testament to the deep understanding of game design by Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto and his team that no one can approach this level of basic satisfaction. But just wait until you experience the game that surrounds this perfected control.

Every level in Super Mario Sunshine represents a world of discovery. You're always seeing something that you want to do.

Beautiful vistas, massive levels, perfect water: a few ingredients of the greatness

"THERE IS FUN TO BE HAD IN EVERY SECOND OF EVERY LEVEL."

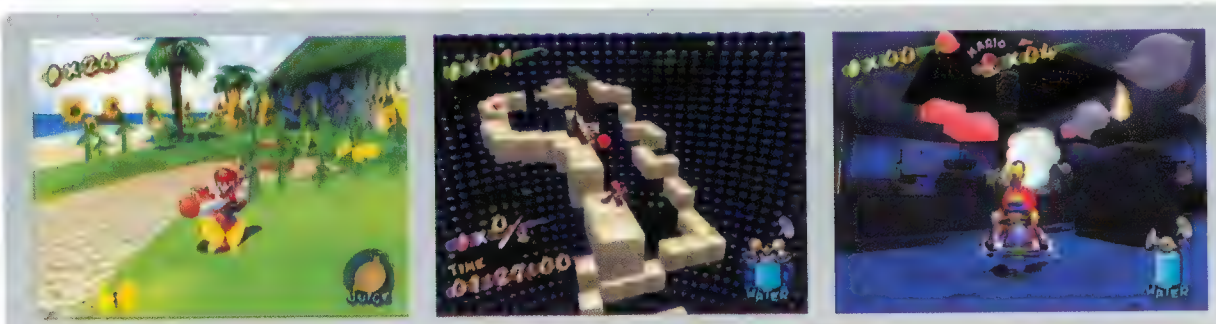
First, a little primer. *Super Mario Sunshine* takes place on the island resort Delphino. Mario, Peach, and Grandpa Mushroom are on their way to a much-needed vacation. Amid dreams of tropical delights, a news flash reveals the presence of an intruder, a mock Mario tearing around the island splashing paint and stealing Shine stars, the island's source of energy. Thinking the actual Mario to be the perpetrator of these crimes, he is tried in court and charged with cleaning up the island and recovering the lost Shine. Along with his new friend, a talking water pump backpack, Mario sets out his quest to clean Delphino and discover the true nature of the false Mario. That's the story: simple and cute.

As Miyamoto mentioned in our E3 issue, *Sunshine*'s game structure is basically unchanged from *Mario 64*. There is a central hub and many levels, with each level needing to be entered multiple times to clear various objectives. Some objectives are shared among the levels, like the search for eight red coins and the chasing down of the false Mario, but many are unique, and you will be amazed at the level of creativity on display. Whether its rolling a giant watermelon through a level or taking water-rocket shots at a giant mechanical Bowser while being thrown for a loop on a twisting and swirling roller coaster, there is fun to be had in every second of every level. And it's nice to know that Miyamoto and his team have not forgotten about the hardcore, as each level also contains an abstract, pure platforming stage that will leave novice gamers crying for mommy.

But the most unique aspect of *Super Mario Sunshine*'s gameplay is the water pump, and I was unprepared for the genius of its execution. The pump has two main modes. The first acts a simple

spray, and Mario can either run and spray or stand in one spot and manually control the trajectory of the water. The second mode allows Mario to hover and boost himself up slightly. Within these two basic actions is a symphony of play mechanics that dazzles the mind. First is the simple cleaning up of the paint that is smeared through some levels. This is an absolute joy. Whether running and spraying or using the "jet-wash" of the hover mode, clearing big splotches of paint is an incredibly satisfying experience. There's just something intangibly great in the way the paint dissolves away when hit with the water. But this is just the beginning. You can use the water spray to attack enemies, or use its momentum to move floating objects (or Mario himself), fill buckets to lift platforms, uncover hidden items, or spray the villagers just to watch them get upset. There are so many uses, and each discovery is like a revelation. Later in the game, you have access to pump upgrades, one of which enables Mario to rocket hundreds of feet up into the air, allowing for godlike views of the various levels that will leave you breathless and dumbfounded at the apparent power of the GameCube, which has, until this moment, apparently laid a little dormant.

But forget polygon counts, texture resolution, and tri-linear mip mapping, as they are irrelevant in this game. What matters is how all the visual elements in the game work in concert with one another to create a convincing world. Notice I didn't say realistic, but convincing. The designers understood exactly which details to make right in order to create a living, breathing universe. The most awe-inspiring of these details is the water. You've never seen or, more importantly, felt water like this before in a videogame. The ef-



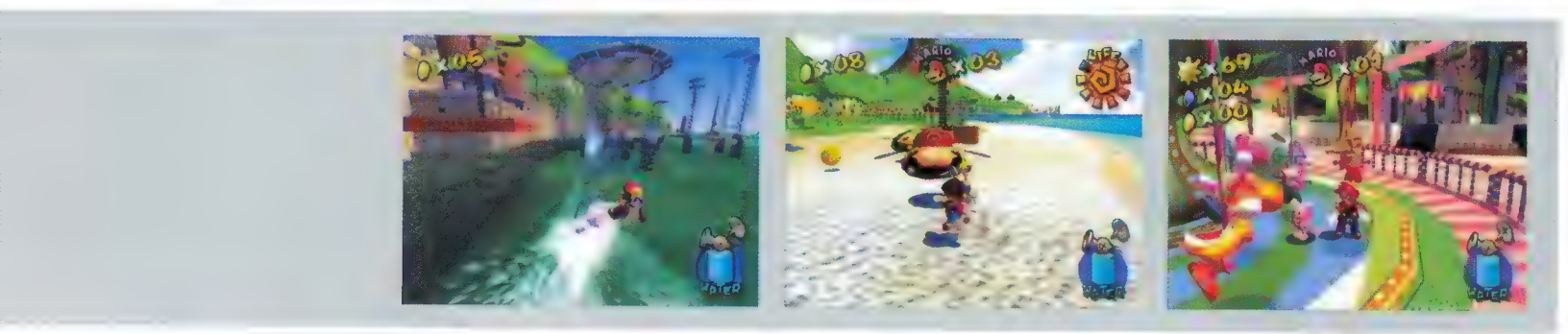
"WITHIN THE TWO BASIC ACTIONS OF THE WATER PUMP IS A SYMPHONY OF PLAY MECHANICS THAT DAZZLES THE MIND."

fect is stunning. You will marvel at the visual distortion of objects under the water as they warp and ripple the refracted light, and you will marvel at the sensation of floating and the surface as Mario bobs and dips in time with the waves. Honestly, this one element alone is worth the price of admission. And as always, this brilliant physical experience is tied to flawless, addictive gameplay.

Beyond the water, the game astounds in its use of color. There's something about the GameCube and the way it displays color that sets it apart from the other systems. This game is so vibrant and alive in its look. Mario literally sparkles and is effective as a character to a degree that utterly defies his apparent simplicity. I've never seen anything like it.

Super Mario Sunshine is one of those sort of impossible games. Its appeal is very broad in the macro sense as all the big elements are spot-on, yet for the enthusiasts that can recognize its greatness on the micro level, it exists in a master class. Every single aspect of the game is perfect, from the control, textures, gameplay, environmental effects, challenge, music, level design, physics and, most importantly, pleasure quotient. There were so many moments in this game that brought such immense joy to me, I literally cannot keep track of them. To write about them all would be to present the reader a laundry list, and no one wants to read one of those. Just take my word for it. Play this game, or forever put down your control pad.

right: a view from Mare Bay's heights; right: fun with waterballoons



GC

Super Mario Sunshine

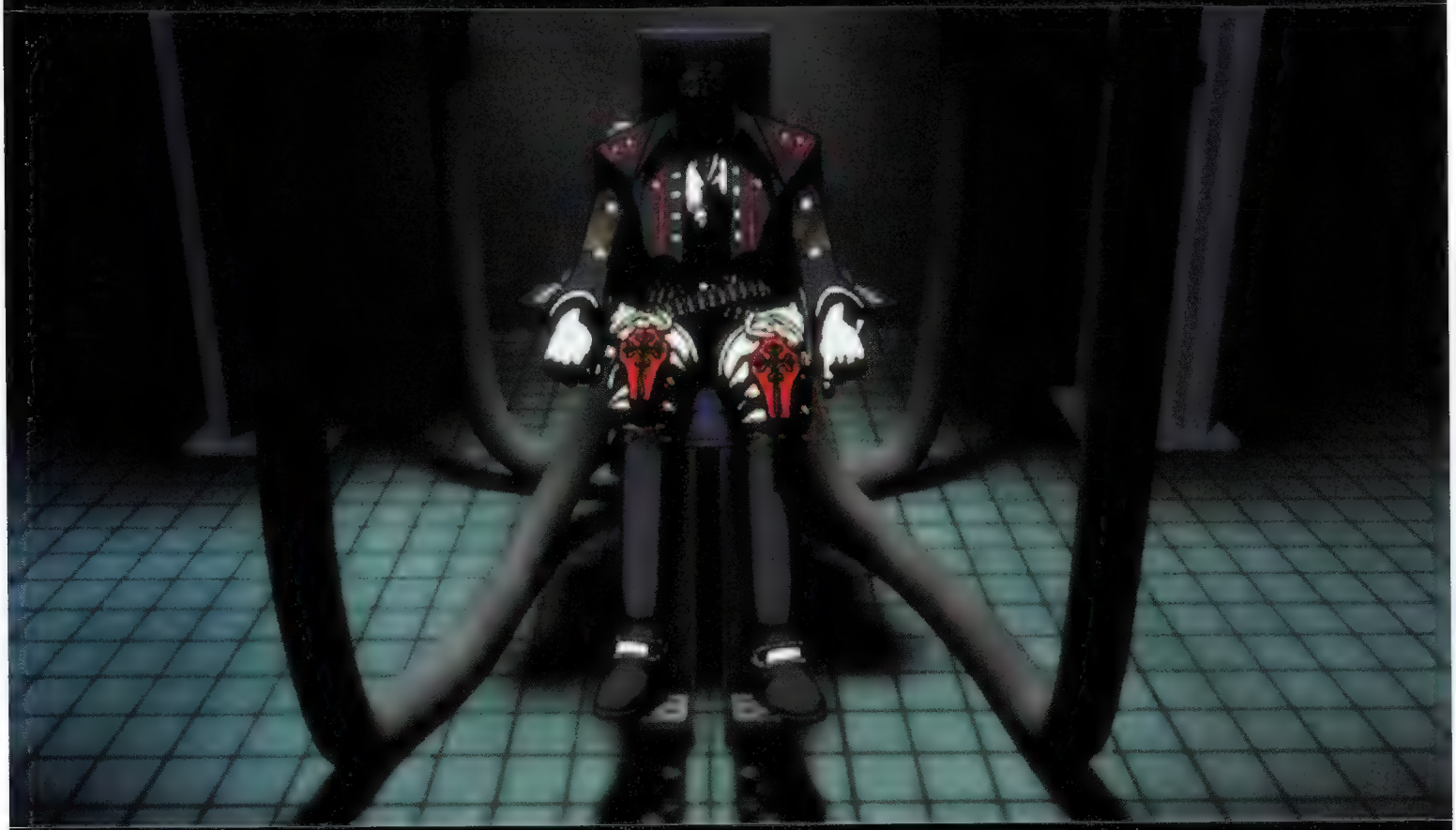
developer: **nintendo**
publisher: **nintendo**
available: **now**

play rating

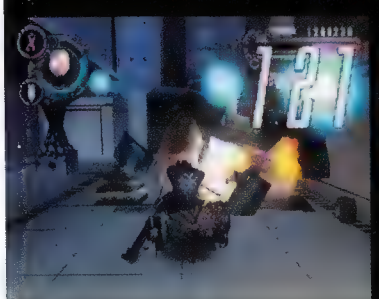
My experience with Super Mario Sunshine is a moment in my life that I will never forget. This is surely one of the finest games ever created.

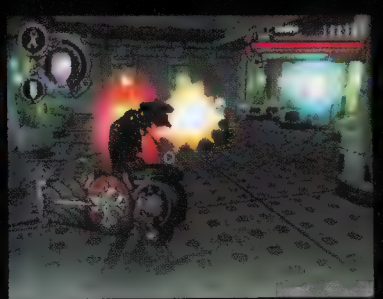
DEAD MAN WALKING

Red's lumbering anime-inspired hero takes action shooters down the path far less, if ever, traveled.



words dave halverson





Gives an entirely new meaning to the phrase "beat it," doesn't it?

I knew I'd love *Gungrave* the minute I laid eyes on it. As a huge fan of anime artist Yasuhiro Naito, his talent being applied to a videogame seemed a stroke of genius, especially in the care of Red, a Japanese developer of whom I've been an avid fan since Bonk gobbled down his first ham bone on the Turbografx 16. I drooled all over Naito's designs in the hit anime series *TRIGUN* (available now from Pioneer Home Entertainment!), although the project lacked sufficient budget to animate them in the fashion they deserved. So, seeing similar, if not better, works, highly animated and beautifully modeled, in a game, is particularly tantalizing, especially seeing as how I get to be one....

In a game environment, where there is far less tedium and more emphasis on animation, his characters seem to rule with an iron fist, and really big *f----ng* guns. But besides its pounding brawn, *Gungrave* also emphasizes art. Like a mobile diorama, scene after scene, the screen is glossed in brilliant cel-shaded hues looking unlike anything that has used the technique before. Somehow, the designers have found a way to texture and light *Gungrave* in a unique way—which is one of the many things I love about the videogame medium. It's so interesting to see how the same hardware can be molded to compensate a specific designer's vision—and when it comes to

character design, no one does it like the Japanese.

It's safe to say, where *Gungrave* really shines is in the art direction and character design departments, which serve as a catalyst for the game's existence, rather than the other way around. Like all of the best pure action games, it establishes a mood and draws you into its world before the first shot is fired, and then, once it's over, gives you countless reasons to dive back in repeatedly. This is what games had to do to succeed before they became many hours or even days long, and it's no easy task. *Gungrave* may only take a few hours to beat, but it can still be said that it's a 20-hour game.

The gameplay itself can be summed up rather easily. Some will say it's a button-pounder (although you hold the button much of the time), but really, the game is as much about style as it is substance. It's not a matter of whether you can play through, but how well and artistically you do so. It's easy to play this game sloppy, but to make it unfold with proficiency and violent grace, as it's meant to be, is another story, and you're rewarded for doing so. You play the role of the betrayed: Grave, murdered and resurrected with the express purpose of revenge and justice. However, before you get anywhere near the leader of the Syndicate that's choking the city, and your retribution, you'll have to mow through swarms of their undead army and the truly unforgettable bosses that protect them. Your tools for doing so are two massive pistols so heavy that a normal human can barely lift one, let alone fire a shot without ripping off an arm; and the cannon from hell, strapped to both arms, crucifixion style. Shooting enemies in a row, well, shooting anything in a row increases your Beat Count, which fills your Demolition Gauge. When it reaches a set number, it gives Grave the ability to fire whichever of the four special attacks he's earned—the Death Blow, Bullet Dance, Hellhound Roar, or Raging Inferno—and it can also be used to recover life. Don't forget to turn the Blood to "on" and press select often for added style points. Beyond that, all I can say is "Kick Their Asses!"

"WHERE GUNGRAVE REALLY SHINES IS IN THE ART DIRECTION AND CHARACTER DESIGN DEPARTMENT..."

PS2

Gungrave

play rating ●●●●●

developer: **red entertainment**

publisher: **sega**

available: **september**

If the first minute of the opening cinema doesn't move you in some way, you bought the wrong game, but if it does, well, you can join our club.

GRAVE DANGER

The Collective unleash their long-awaited ode to the Slayer, and it's every bit the game we were praying for.

words dave halverson

In each generation, a slayer is born... and thankfully, once in a while, she gets a really kickin' game named after her. So is the case with Buffy the Vampire Slayer for Xbox. Dare I say it is the best TV-to-game endeavor ever? I've noted. Whenever you see superb voice and scene-surround (really outstanding, classic schoolmarm in game reveals), and a kick-ass-kicking soundtrack with you're bound to hit paydirt. This is your first visit to Hellmouth, better start saving up for some DVDs, because whether you're a fan of the series or not, the game will likely move you into the Buffyverse!

What makes it so special? Well, besides painstakingly detailed and textured-up levels, drop-dead gorgeous visuals, and screenlight inspired gameplay, the story is shepherded with surgical skill and garnished gameplay with seriously cool one-liners and contemporary continuity. The level design isn't too shabby either, the puzzles in Buffy don't exist solely to elongate matters, but actually make sense within the confines of the environments. Ladders, switches and doors are handled like well, ladders, switches and doors. I know that should go without saying, but if you play a lot of adventure games, you know that's not often the case. What a masterful amalgam of fighting, exploration, and storytelling and, yikes! This game is to die for. Buffy, herself, rarely sucks up which is welcome in this case. In fact, all of the cliques in the game to date (Willow, Giles, Xander, Angel, Anya, Willow, Cordelia, Spike, and Master Olivi) are all spoken for the actual actors and whoever is filling in for SMG is a dead ringer.

Since Buffy's job is to kick undead ass, you spend the bulk of your

"Let that be a lesson to you, or those who pass by your mangled corpse." - Buffy

"DARE I SAY IT IS THE BEST TV-TO-GAME ADAPTATION EVER? I DO INDEED."

Still, ending the screen mode with entertaining lily Buffy's wisecracks, such as shaken, green clones, the game falls short and of course a wasted crossbow. Buffy puts them to good use flaying the crap out of demons, possessed cheerleaders, bad haircuts and other such apparitions until they're near death before and then opens them a non-lippe sandwich to snack on, on their way back to the underworld. Doing so beefs up Buffy's mojo. Attain the uses to unleash the devastating attacks she learns from Master Gao, personal mentor. This being the main element in the game—along with a fair amount of Tomb Raider-ish adventuring and puzzle-solving—the game's designers at The Collective know they're good have taken extreme measures to make sure the combat is the game at its best. In doing so, they've devised pretty much the single best hand-to-hand combat I've experienced in a 3D adventure game. I know that's saying a lot, but believe me. It's true, cross my heart and hope to die.

Further enjoyment into your Buffy game, the visual effects are outstanding. Touches as subtle as a light that spins over the grooves of a cemetery or gothic cupolas flowing in a mysterious yet perfectly re-created, and the game's furnishings—chairs, desks, tables, lockers, coffins, crypts, graves, church pews, etc.—are all painstakingly realistic and lavishly brandished. Should Buffy be in need of a stake, as long as it's wooden and somewhat heavy, Buffy can break a limb plunge it into the undead until it stops its pesky to further aid the slang. For real, Buffy can also find and use potions, and it's Zippo amount a little, arsenic crystals that Willow can use to up her magical powers here and levels.

So what's missing, or not quite up to snuff? Well, nothing. The game's manual isn't a bonus, with one-touch weapon equipping, the overall presentation is superb and the integrity of the material has been regally addressed. Somewhere Joss Whedon (Buffy's creator, is a very happy man. It's not often a TV property gets this kind of treatment, but it couldn't happen to a greater girl...who, btw, happens to kill things everyday and be right about it. Hey, we all have our place in time.

XB

Buffy The Vampire Slayer

developer: **the collective**

publisher: **ea**

available: **now**

play rating

Buffy fans can breathe a huge sigh of relief. Not only is the game great, but with Buffy still hotter than a witch's tit in a brass bra, you can bet a sequel is imminent.

YOU DEVIL

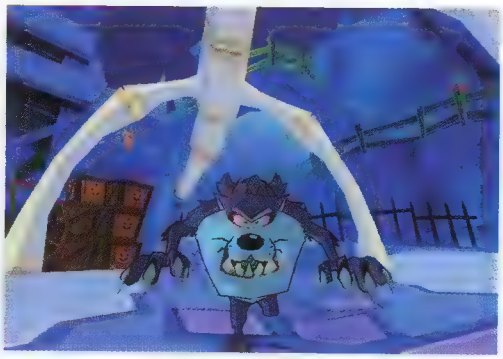
Taz's first starring role since his whirlwind tour on 16-bit is toon-tastic.

words dave halverson

The reason why anyone would make a Looney Toons game based on any character other than Taz perplexes me. Of the aging ensemble, Taz remains the only cast member that really lends itself to a game, with his hair-trigger temperament, insatiable appetite and, of course, that famous Tasmanian devil tornado spin. Plus, Taz truly transcends age: he's a fierce little critter, but put him in a dress and make-up; totally kid friendly—just pray he isn't hungry. So then why hasn't he starred in his own game since the glory days of 16-bit when he lit up the Genesis and SNES? Who cares? He's back, he's bad, and Infogrames has surrounded him with an intoxicating action bonanza.

After busting out of jail, where he was doing time for crimes against the other WB toons, Taz is out to destroy the ridiculous amount of wanted signs that Yosemite Sam

has posted in every corner of the Yosemite Zoo, Sam Francisco, the Wile E West, and Taz Land A-maze-ment park. The rascal is also using Taz's beloved She Devil as bait, so plenty of incentive there; I hear once you've had a she-devil, you can never go back. These signs aren't exactly easy to get to, either; in fact, each requires that Taz trigger some sort of chain reaction to demolish things in the way. The fantastically devised puzzle elements alone would make a solid game, but there's lots more variables along the way, like net-toting zoo keepers and interactive elements around every corner, native to each wickedly devised world. Lucky for Taz he can duck into a nearby phone booth and disguise himself as a skater, snowboarder, or what have you, depending on the terrain, and it's the only way to send zoo keepers off the map, to that great zoo-keeper place in the sky. Taz, modeled perfectly with a cel-shaded coating, seems game throughout, reacting to every move you make, dispensing the grumbling, garbled vocalizations he's famous for. Between worlds, rather then dispensing the usual bosses, some of the coolest vs. mini games you've ever played lay in wait, and the presentation overall, from the graphics to the music (which is especially good), couldn't be better suited to the material. This is easily the best WB-based game to come down the pike yet. If you're even mildly fascinated by the kind, I highly recommend giving it a spin.



PS2 **XB**

Taz Wanted

developer: **blitz games**
publisher: **infogrames**
available: **now**

play rating

The WB's still got some gas in its tank! Taz continues as a viable critter beyond 2K, proving once and for all that you really are what you eat. Okay, that made no sense. Great game, though!

CLONE WARS

Sega GT 2002 is the best version of Gran Turismo the Xbox will ever see.

words michael hobbs

At least *Sega GT* makes no attempt to obscure its source of inspiration. I mean, what does Sega GT stand for if not Sega Gran Turismo? Fine. How does the old saying go? A good artist copies, a great artist steals. Well, I don't know if we can call *Sega GT* the work of a great artist, but it is a damn good racing game.

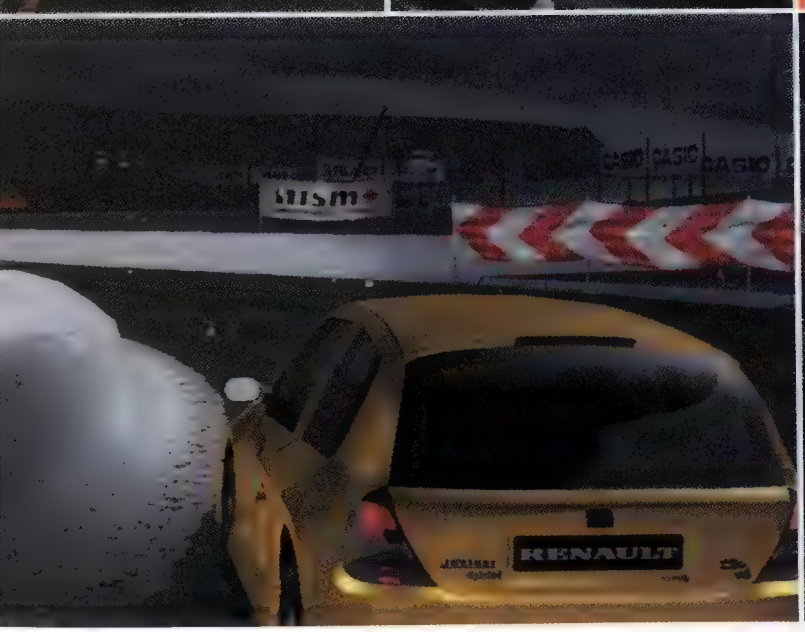
If anything, you can think of *Sega GT* as *Gran Turismo* lite. It's got lots of cars, license tests, upgrades, and racing challenges. The difference is in the structure, which is a little less demanding. You can accomplish a lot in the game without taking so many license tests, and when they do come, they are singular and between a set of races. And the money earned for winning goes further here than it does in *Gran Turismo*, making it far easier to upgrade and buy new cars. These things make the game quite easy to pick up and enjoy, but also I think a little less involving than *Gran Turismo*. The edge has been blunted. I do however like the fact that taking damage during a race in *Sega GT* costs money, which means there is penalty for hitting things. In *Gran Turismo*, it was sometimes too tempting to use a well-judged bash to score a decent lap time.

Whatever you make of *Sega GT*'s game structure, there is little you can say about the game's graphics other than "awesome." The car models are astounding. I especially like how you can see the cars' finest details being affected by light, like little chrome bits glinting in the sun. And the courses offer a wonderful level of realism, with fantastic atmospherics and a very good sense of place about them. Only the cardboard trees detract from an otherwise stellar visual presentation.

Sega GT 2002 is what it is, a slightly tweaked interpretation of *Gran Turismo* with great graphics. I'll admit that something of the magic of *Gran Turismo* is missing here, but there also isn't a lot wrong with the game. Rest assured that this formula won't be done any better on Xbox.

"THERE IS LITTLE YOU CAN SAY ABOUT THE GAME'S GRAPHICS OTHER THAN 'AWESOME'"

Without a doubt some of the best car models ever seen. Still, Gran Turismo has a far larger selection of cars to choose from.



XB **Sega GT 2002**

developer: **sega**
publisher: **sega**
available: **august**

play rating

Say what you will of *Sega GT2002*'s originality, but there's no denying the quality of this *Gran Turismo*-inspired racer

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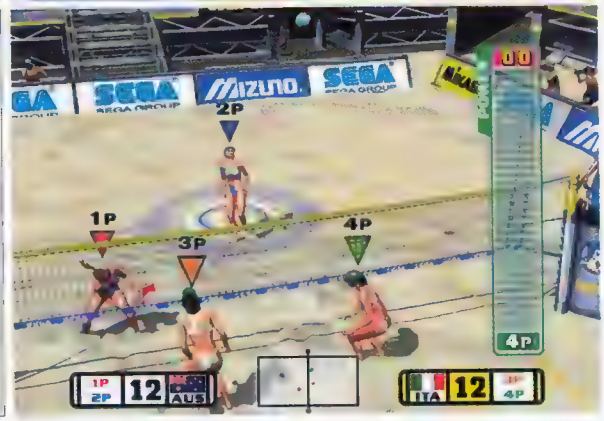
Beach Spikers

GC

play rating ● ● ● ● ●

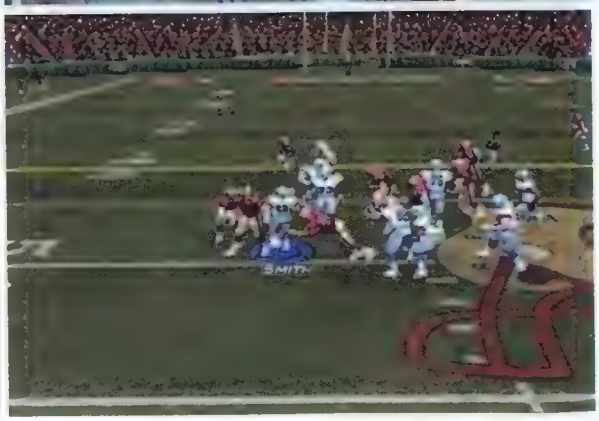


Now here's a sports game that I can get behind...because of the behinds. Actually, if you take away the amazing graphics in *Beach Spikers*, including gaming's most realistic sand, stunning models, and gorgeous courts, you're still left with the single best volleyball videogame ever devised—no surprise coming from AM2. Cop a quick feel by entering the arcade mode, and then once acclimated with the games incredibly intuitive controls, have at the tournament mode, build your babes and hit the beach. No matter how you like your women, with 70 hair styles, 50 faces, and 70 bikinis to choose from, I think you'll find a pair you're happy with. AM2 supplies the bodies, which need no work, other than the type that would be inappropriate to discuss here. Not nearly as proficient as the arcade beauties, the gist in world tourney is in slowly improving your team's abilities as they assail the ranks. Much like *Sega Sports Tennis*, *Beach Spikers* is pretty much perfection in every aspect of the gameplay, and while it's not all that complex in its makeup (it's a fairly simple game), the nuances, coupled with fantastic visual presentation, make it impossible to put down. DH

Madden 2003

GC PS2 XB

play rating ● ● ● ● ●



If you've played Madden in the past, you pretty much no what to expect, but it all looks just that much better.

What is it that makes *Madden NFL 2003* better than *Madden NFL 2002*, a football sim that left little room for improvement in the eyes of the game's biggest fans. Of course, incremental improvements will inevitably always be made, which is mostly why *Madden 2003* is better than *Madden 2002*. Better animations. More details. Exhaustive extras, like the training camps and coaching drills that matter nothing to some (me), and form the alter of the sim religion for others. A little more realism, a little more convincing crunches and pops. Above all, a better feeling and playing game, boosted by subtleties that you may not even recognize until you've made it to the playoffs.

While this is still the same foundation from last year, the game plays with more impact and the contests bring an authenticity of The Real Thing even closer to your control. *Madden*'s distinct feel remains intact, with more of an emphasis on weightier physics and controlled pacing, but I found myself enjoying an extended season more than ever before. This series never stops improving. (Sorry for neglecting the online aspect: we got the game before Net-play could be properly tested).

MX Superfly

PS2 GC XB

play rating ● ● ● ○ ○

Ricky Carmichael, I mean, er, *MX SuperFly*, is good this year, although there is one thing I absolutely loathe, and that's the super-hyper-lame-ass "ooh-yeah" and "woo!" they feel necessary to slide in every time you pull off anything even remotely cool, and the similar "what the?" and "careful!" every time you get bumped. You can't turn it off and it is the epitome of bad, make it go away, please. That said, new additions like dirt accumulation, female racers, and a mind-numbing quiver of mini-games and freestyle venues are all honed to perfection, as are the 27 picture-perfect courses. I'm perturbed once again, however, that such perfect rider models never sit, not even down straights, but compared to the "awright" crap I suppose that's now the least of my worries. I say fix the animation (sitting animation and a rider axis at the waist are sorely needed), and re-think the music for '03, and we'll tack on those extra stars. Cube owners have to live with some texture fade-in, which is unfortunate, so if you have a PS2 or Xbox, choose accordingly. DH

Sega Soccer Slam

XB

play rating ● ● ● ● ○

Spot any differences between the Xbox and GameCube versions? We can't. Not that we're complaining.

I really didn't think I would see *Sega Soccer Slam* on any platform other than GameCube, but here it is on Xbox, and it's coming for PS2.

Of course, when we're talking about ports, we have to talk about the differences between versions. In the case of *Sega Soccer Slam*, the changes are relegated to some new modes of play, as a little surprisingly, the game looks more or less identical to the GameCube version. Nothing wrong with that, but I guess I expected to see a couple more visual tricks (bump-mapped grass?) applied to the look, but I can detect none.

What has changed is the addition of a new arcade mode, which offers both a hot potato mini-game and a character-on-character fighting arena. These bring a little more variety to multiplayer sessions, but don't add too much to the overall formula, which remains a balls-out game of no-rules soccer. The matches are totally chaotic and a little bit out of control, but the game is an absolute blast to play, far more like an arcade game than most modern sports titles. The thrill is fleeting, but it is there. MH

play anime

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SO BUSTED...

The ultimate guilty-pleasure action-babes are back and busting out all over.

words dave halverson

After what seems like an eternity baking in the ADV ovens, Team Warrior has finally made its triumphant big-breasted return, and not a moment to soon. We needed another big boob blaster pretty bad and no one does it better than *Burn Up. Excess* drips sex appeal and makes no bones about it. Mia to her gun: "You're so hard and long, just a little while and I'll let you shoot your whole load...promise." Team Warriors' individual characterizations have all been amplified, but none so much as Rio and Mia. Rio's shopping problem is now the bane of her existence. She owes everybody, and will do anything to make enough money to pay down her credit cards (so she can blow more cash on clothes and lingerie). Meanwhile Mia's love for munitions has become so serious that if she doesn't pop a cap on a regular basis, she goes into a psychotic rage. This, like everything else in *Burn Up Excess*, causes her ample breasts to jiggle frantically.

The story lines run almost parallel to *Burn Up W*'s, with a series of smaller events and capers linked to a larger diabolical scheme involving an omnipotent shadow organization who I'm sure we will soon find out are bent on taking over Japan, if not the world.

Underwear theft and even a tranny bar make the series debut (Moroccan Sex Change Farewell to Manhood Tour, anyone?) and we even get to meet Mia's dad, who wastes no time in grabbing her knockers and exclaiming, "Someone's had a visit from the titty fairy!" You want guilty pleasure—you got it.

"WE NEEDED ANOTHER BIG BOOB BLASTER AND NO ONE DOES IT BETTER THAN BURN UP."

BURN UP EXCESS: TO SERVE AND PROTECT vol.1

extras

play score

"EVANGELION FANS REJOICE! THE WAIT IS OVER!" - Wizard Magazine

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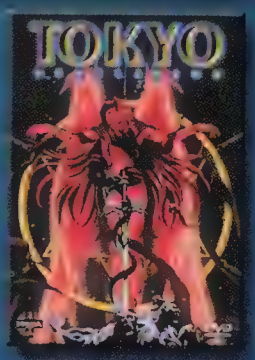

ASTRO BOY

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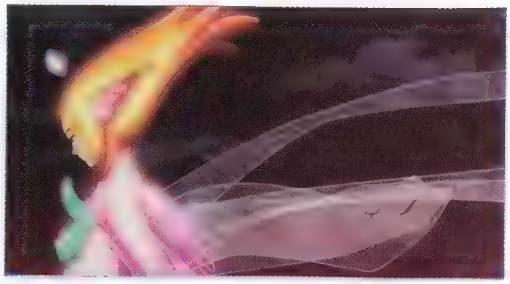
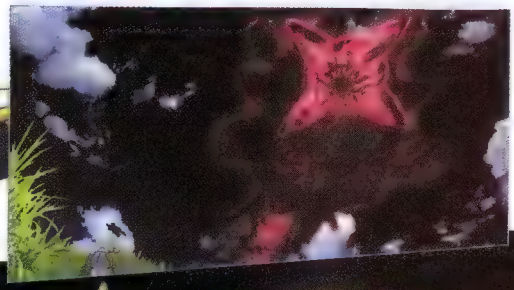


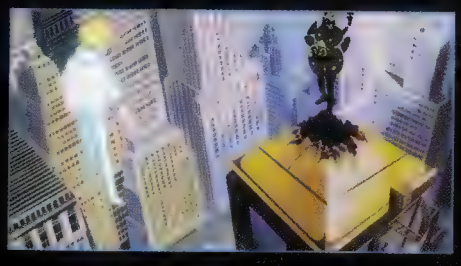


Watching a lot of anime, becoming a fan in any capacity, requires the acceptance that if you are not in it for the character designs and/or the story, you're in big trouble. Because anime, for the most part, is rooted in TV, and more often than not, it is poorly animated. This aspect of anime makes titles like *Arjuna* all the more special in the rare instances when they happen along your path. A series comprised of cel-shaded renders and digital animation, it's the epitome of modern technique applied with a less-than-massive budget, and the result is spectacular. The icing is that even if *Arjuna* weren't so beautiful, the story and characters would put it at the top of many a list regardless.

Arjuna is the story of a young, inquisitive high school girl who dies in a freak motorcycle accident as her and her boyfriend Tokio are racing to enjoy a sunset outside the confines and pollution of Kobe Japan. As she floats above her body witnessing her mother and boyfriend's agony as she flat lines, she is whisked away into space where, just as she is about to cross over, a voice interrupts her passing. Juna is made to see the death of humanity, swallowed up because of its abuse of the Earth. The voice makes Juna an offer; if she agrees to fight the menace that would consume humanity, Raaja, he will spare her life. Finally and reluctantly, at the last moment, she accepts. Back at the hospital, where she has been dead for minutes, the heart monitor hums back to life—Juna is alive.

From death, she springs forth in the blink of an eye, escapes the hospital, and makes her way onto a waiting chopper where it is revealed that "the voice" was that of a limp, weak young boy. Pushed around in a wheelchair by a haunting young girl, he is protected by an organization called S.E.E.D. The purpose of S.E.E.D. is to serve The Avatar of Time, once the boy, now Juna, and to protect the Earth from cataclysmic disasters. Tokio gives chase, mother is in a state of shock, and a captivating series gets off to a truly inspiring start. Arjuna, from the creator of *Macross Plus* and *Escaflowne*, Shoji Kawamori, is anime that has it all—human drama, action, and divine implications—surrounded by stunning character designs and a soaring score.

"ARJUNA IS ANIME THAT HAS IT ALL."



EARTH MAIDEN ARJUNA: REBIRTH vol.1

extras

play score

Ys

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MAN BERRIES

Pioneer's new series makes it fashionable to be a drag queen.

words christina alexander

So the title sounds like some genetic farm experiment gone horribly wrong, and it makes most humans who stop too long to consider the reality of such a culinary combination a little queasy, but *Strawberry Eggs* is more than just a disgusting breakfast idea. This new release from Pioneer takes the idea of a standard girl's High School drama and adds a weird and slightly perverted line of humor to form a surprisingly amusing creation.

While searching for the job of his dreams, a physical education teacher, Hibiki Amawa, unknowingly applies to a school that only employs women teachers. Offended at the school's sexist policy, Hibiki decides that the only thing to do is become a drag queen, get the job, and prove the lady principal of the school wrong. With the help of his crazy old landlady, and some panty hose, Hibiki goes from Mr. Amawa to Miss Hibiki, the new teacher. Enter Kuzuha Fuko, a girl who has never been what one would consider coordinated or confident, as her friends often have to rescue her from herself. The meeting of these two main characters may just prove that Kuzuha is stronger than she knows, and Hibiki is truly the teacher he says he is.

A slightly twisted take on an old idea, *Strawberry Eggs* is more entertaining and unique than the cover suggests. While the story line covers nothing more important than the lives of a drag queen teacher and his favorite student (the world is not on the brink of destruction by a demon lord), nothing more is needed to keep the audience's attention. Of course, the random panty shots may help those males whose attention starts to wander when things get too sugary. The art doesn't disappoint either, as the designs are suspiciously familiar to *Hand Maid May*. Distributed by Pioneer, the *Strawberry Eggs* DVD is packed with several extras, including an art gallery and an introduction to the characters and the people who create their voices. The random country music riffs that stick out like a sore thumb in the sound track are definitely something that this anime could have done without. Luckily, the sudden shifts to cow-herding tunes are few and far between. So if series like Love Hina and Hand Maid May are your bag of chips, then you may want to add *Strawberry Eggs* to your basket.

"STRAWBERRY EGGS IS MORE THAN JUST A DISGUSTING BREAKFAST IDEA."

STRAWBERRY EGGS: MAKE-UP EXAM vol. 1

studio: **pioneer entertainment** rating: **13 & up** running time: **100 mins**

extras: Dolby Digital, Isolated Score, Dual Language, Preview Collection

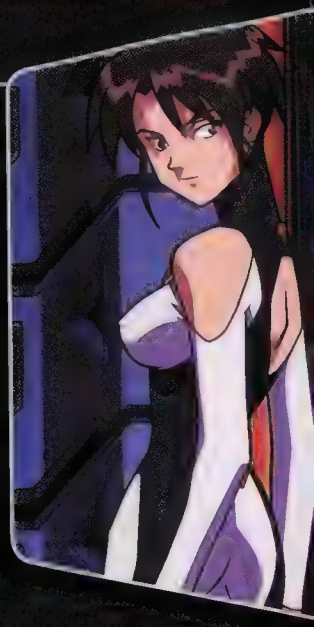
play score

Bubblegum Crisis 2040: Perfect Collection

adv films / 15 & up / 650 mins. / dvd / ●●●●○

words dave halverson

Twenty-six episodes and 650 minutes of fast girls in hard suits—what more could you ask for? *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040 Perfect Collection* tucks it all neatly away into one very nicely designed three-inch thick DVD container that is surprisingly devoid of anything special other than the sleeve and a simple fold-out card within. The discs are bare bones, too, although I suppose it's really the content that counts. In case you've been in a cryogenic slumber (welcome to 2002!), *Bubblegum Crisis 2040* is a fleshed-out version of the OVA series, released back before talkies. Billed as a "cyberpunk classic" (whatever that means), sometime in the not-too-distant future, Tokyo is rocked to its foundation by a massive earthquake. In order to return the city to beyond its former splendor, the Genom Corporation creates Voomer and Boomer robots, synthetic slaves programmed to do humanities dirty work and perform menial tasks currently occupied by high-school students (a telling pictorial) and construction workers (even more telling). When these Endomorphic bio-bots shift into psycho mode and start to mow down people like hicks at a flesh fair, a team of armored vigilantes known as the Knight Sabers leap into action, outfitted with neural-processing skin suits capable of taking a licking and...I don't dare say it. This is their story, beginning as the fourth member Linna Yamazaki joins the fray, and it's one of the best TV series to come along in the past decade. For its length (though the quality does dip mid-season), overall *BC 2040* is exceptionally well drawn and sufficiently animated to tell its tale. It also houses one of the best opening sequences this side of *Angel Links* and is glossed over by a pervading sense of cool.



dvd extras

Every ADV preview known to man, Character/Voice actor bios, Dual Language

"IT'S ONE OF THE BEST ANIME TV SERIES TO COME ALONG IN THE PAST DECADE."

Orphen: The Third Talisman vol.6

adv films / 12 & up / 125 mins. / dvd / ●●●●○

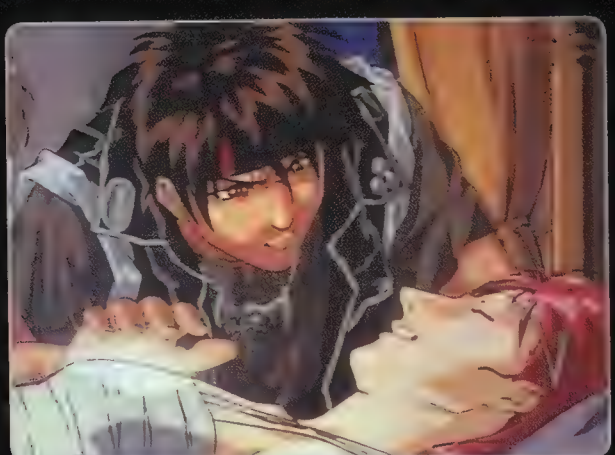
words dave halverson

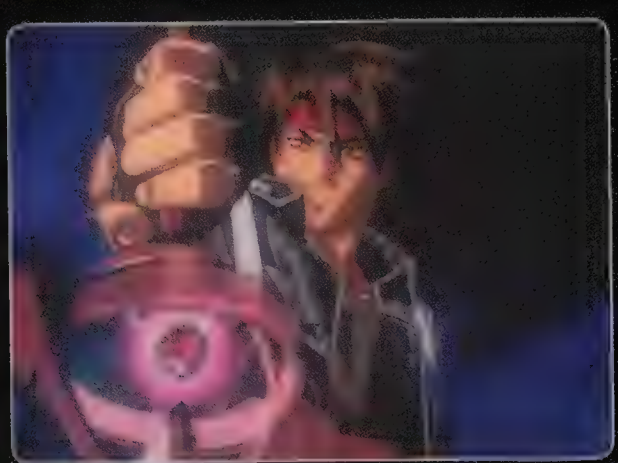
dvd extras

Interviews with Japanese Cast and Staff, Clean Opening and Closing, Dual Language, ADV Previews

After *Orphen Volume 5* (which ranks among the most poorly animated volumes of anything I have ever seen), the finale was a revelation, because I really like this series. Even though the music is hokey and under-realized, and *Orphen*'s design changed like the wind throughout, there's something about the traveling trio. It was the connection with The Tower of Fang that kept me intrigued, along, of course, with Orphen's devotion to Azalie, Cleao, and Majic. In the final episode, "Journey's End," they pull out all of the stops. When Orphen finally gets Azalie (in Childman's body), Childman (in the Bloody August's body) and the Sword of Balthanders (now fully charged) into one place...the sparks really fly, as do the animation, photo effects, and attention to detail. I'd have never guessed the set-up between Childman and Azalie, or the outcome, which troubles me still, but the producers close the show with almost uncharacteristic flare. Viewing the staff interviews, which feature the worst translation ever subtitled (oh, it's bad, you gotta check it out), the secret is revealed: they made the last episode first; fancy that.

"THE SPARKS REALLY FLY, AS DOES THE ANIMATION, PHOTO EFFECTS, AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL."





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Saber Marionette JtoX vol.2

bandai entertainment / 13 & up / 125 mins. / dvd / ●●●●○

words christina alexander

Getting a bit of a slow start out of the starting gate, *Saber Marionette JtoX* doesn't yet resemble the action-packed anime that its predecessors were. None of the familiar and exhilarating battles are anywhere to be seen in these middle five episodes, as the main focus is on the mental growth of Lime, Cherry and Bloodberry. But, that's not such a bad thing (except for all you violence mongers). If only all anime concentrated so carefully on character development, what a wonderful world it would be. With a much more lighthearted and downright "girly" feel than the previous series, *SMJtoX*, while still loads of fun to watch, is in serious need of some gratuitous marionette violence.

Having brought peace to Terra II, Lime, Cherry, and Bloodberry are now free to learn and grow as much as their maiden circuits will allow, and each of them is brought face to face with their hearts' (or circuits') desire. A new best friend for Lime, a second Otaru for Bloodberry, and a baby for Cherry? Too good to be true? Maybe, but can any of them make the decision to let go and place the needs of the group over their own consistently denied wants? As if the act of growing up wasn't hard enough, Otaru's marionettes have even more to worry about, as there are hints that their old Gartlant enemies have not been completely laid to rest.

This second installment of *SMJtoX* not only concentrates on the evolution of marionette psyche, but it also starts to reveal sinister hints of possible antagonists. Ten episodes may be a bit long to wait for the true plot-train to pull out of the station, but the sheer charisma of the characters make me ridiculously giddy even during the filler episodes. There is rarely an episode that does not greatly impact some aspect of the story or contribute to character development. Combine that fact along with the delightful voice of Megumi Hayashibara and the unique yet familiar character designs, and you get a very welcome next installment of a lovable series.

"IF ONLY ALL ANIME CONCENTRATED SO CAREFULLY ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT."

dvd extras

Every ADV preview known to man, Character/Voice actor Bios, Dual Language

Blue Gender vol.3

funimation / 15 & up / 72 mins. / dvd / ●●●○○

words dave halverson

It's been awhile since we checked in with *Blue Gender* (the DVDs come at a staggeringly slow interval) the story of a weasly young man (Yuji, a cross between Hugh Jackman and Luke Perry) awakened from a cryogenic slumber to find the planet overrun by leftovers from *Starship Troopers*. In other words, the bugs have landed. A recon team sent from Second Earth—the space colony that houses a few million of Earth's best and brightest, chosen to flee Earth and keep humanity alive—discovers Yuji. The rest of humanity, written off as bug bait, are not too keen on military types from the colony and the people from the colony pretty much think of them as cattle. But the colony needs to know more about the disease that caused Yuji to take the long good night, so, the hyper-stiff, bitch-on-wheels, Marlene, is dragging Yuji across the desert, dodging bugs and protecting her "sample"; sweet story huh? *Blue Gender*'s serious tone and realistic settings are actually its strong suits. It's a serious sci-fi show, nicely produced. Its Achilles heel, indicative of most TV based anime, is that at this mid series juncture it's almost devoid of animation. Besides a few spurts here and there, *Blue Gender* is reduced to mostly panning and zooming around flat pictures. It's got one helluva nice opening sequence, though, and the first three episodes looked markedly better then the last six, which will likely pick back up as the series winds down. *Blue Gender*'s saving grace, its dark, understated ambience and take-no-prisoners tone, make it a compelling and worthwhile investment, plus, it's easy to save up between DVDs. Volume three was released June 4, and volume four isn't due until October 15.

"BLUE GENDER'S SERIOUS TONE AND REALISTIC SETTINGS ARE ACTUALLY ITS STRONG SUITS."

dvd extras

Textless Songs, Cast Bios, Blue File 2, Image Gallery, Character Profiles, "Love Taught Me" Extended Version, Dual Language

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ANIME EXPO 2002: EXPOSED

We came, we saw, we walked five blocks for media credentials. Anime Expo 2002 was, among many other things, an eventful convention, as anime continues to gain support in America. ADV Films, Pioneer, Central Park Media, Media Blasters, Bandai, Manga, Tokyo Pop, and RightStuf, prepare to roll in the next wave of animated entertainment for people willing to dress funny and brave lines that made Disney Land on the Fourth of July look like your neighborhood supermarket.

report dave halverson

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ANIME EXPO 2002: NOW DRAWING

Before we get directly into Expo goodness, some videogame related anime news: ADV's highly anticipated Zone of Enders OAV, *Idolo*, will hit the streets on Sept. 24, and will include interviews with the Director and Character and Mecha Designers, as well as the Noir trailer. There's no date yet on when *Wild Arms* may show up, although it's looking more and more like we'll be waiting until 2003, and in case you missed it in this month's Ink, be sure and check out the story on the *Ghost in Shell* TV series.

Anime Expo continues to grow exponentially with each passing year (so much so that press had to walk a mile for credentials—whoopee!). This year, before you even got through the convention doors, Tokyo Pop was handing out Initial D bags big enough to sneak in Mini-Me, and NewType USA was casting tantalizing bait for their American debut. The U.S. version of Japan's number-one selling anime magazine, will contain American content to compliment the eye-popping Japanese pictorials, a centerfold (great move that) and will maintain the large size, high quality, and left-to-right format. A subscription hovers somewhere around a small car payment, but if you want the complete anime package, well, we cover the best, so just buy Play and save the rest of your cash for anime. Unless you buy both—that's cool.

We will now commence inundating you with new acquisition information. Since the consensus is that Pioneer pretty much stole the show, we'll start there. Besides *I, My, Me! Strawberry Eggs* (the most cursed title in the history of DVD until *Fruits Basket* shows up; I mean, what guy's gonna bring this one up to the cashier?) and *Hellsing* (2002's best new series thus far, in our opinion), Pioneer announced *X TV*, the 52-episode *Lupin the 3rd*, *Master Keaton, Mahoromatic Maiden, Gatekeepers 21, Chobits, Fushigi Yugi Eikoden* (it just won't die!) and the third *Patlabor* movie. Additionally, *Vandread the 2nd stage* will begin on Sept. 24, the same day as *X* TV's debut.

Tokyo Pop, the new manga king, is going to have a very busy '03. Newly dubbed *Reign* (was *Alexander*, good move there) and the company's 800 lb. gorilla, *Initial D*, will follow *Brigadoon*, and *Marmalade Boy*, early on in the year. T-Pop also has a ton of Manga on the dock, including the Akira Film Book, and the original Lupin Manga from Monkey Punch.

From Bandai, Argent Soma, Melty Lancer, Infinite Ryvius, and Kikaider 1, were announced but the titles that have us all glossy eyed, are of course, Ghost in the Shell TV, and the .hack game and anime series. Look for the game this September, and the anime, early next year.

Media Blasters are busier than ever; besides the newly released Berserk, Cosmic Warrior Zero, and EX Driver; Babel II is due Aug. 27, and on the Tokyo Shock front, Giant Monsters will soon have you rolling on the floor... Think King of Monsters on the Neo Geo only with real people dressed up like monsters...

Over at Manga, news that Astro Boy has been pushed to next year, due to Spielberg's nabbing of the rights for the CG movie, (which should prove a major booster for the DVD) was no big shocker, as the only thing on anyone's mind is Death and Rebirth and moreover The End of Evangelion. Beyond that Virus Buster Serge, and (I knew it!) New Dominion Tank Police were announced.

We don't hear from RightStuf nearly enough, but they have some great stuff in the works: *The Gigantor* box set (a Rhino RS joint—dubbed, with a new transfer) is just around the corner, and their new titles include *Hooligan, Gravitation TV, Muryo, Nonamura Hospital*, and *Spotlight*. RS also officially announced the live action *Angel of Darkness* movie.

Central Park Media announced plans to release the entire *Revolutionary Girl Utena* TV series (originally cut short in its initial run), as well as the second *Yu-Yu Hakusho* movie, and newly acquired *Alien 9, DNA 2*, and *Neko Jiro-So*. Newly re-mastered, *A-Ko* should be just out, along with the digitally re-mastered *Lodoss War* DVD collection, and Legend of Himiko. *Grave of the Fireflies* is set for an October release.

Industry big-wig, ADV, has *Noir*, and *RahXephon*, so they could stop there and take the year off, but the biggest are always busy keeping it that way, and ADV shows no signs of relinquishing the title. ADV has added the *Blue Seed* and *Sorcerer Hunter* OAVs (no big surprise there) to their already busting-at-the-seams lineup, along with *Nuku Nuku Dash, King of Bandits Jing, Pretear, Kolaida Star*, and the *Zaion* OAV. They are also unloading a boatload of OST's, and of course, *Lady Death* is still waiting in the wings. Just before press time (just days away from Comicon; full report next month) ADV announced *The Voices of a Distant Star*, one of Japan's most talked-about anime titles of the year, from *CoMix Wave*, with whom ADV announced a newly formed alliance to work with them promoting their anime and manga artists in America. "CoMix Wave manages more than 50 of Japan's top manga artists and illustrators, and works to discover and promote new talent within the industry. The company also manages production, both in Japan and overseas, of anime projects, including Koji Morimoto and Studio 4oC's Clio Award-winning anime-style television advertisements for "La Saunda," a Hong Kong shoe franchise." ADV shoes? At this point, anything is possible.

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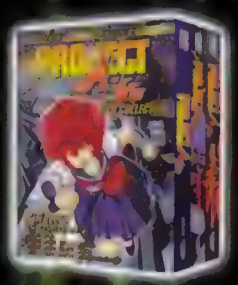

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SOMEONE CALL A PRIEST

An interview with Min-Woo Hyung, Priest manwha creator, available from Tokyo Pop (tokyopop.com).

words dave halverson

In the frontier of the American West, a veil of evil threatens to engulf humanity. Servants of the fallen archangel Temozarela are paving the way for their dark lords resurrection. One man stands in the way of the apocalypse: Ivan Isaacs, a fallen priest who sold his soul to the devil Belial for the power to fight evil. Armed with a wicked blade and silver bullets, Ivan will give the heretics a baptism of blood in his pilgrimage to humanity's redemption.

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What was the first manwha that you worked on and what was it about?
"Chronicle of a Hot-blooded Judo King" was the title of my first manwha. The concept, in and of itself, isn't unique. It's rather a common young adult theme, written purely to entertain.

When did you first begin work on "Priest"? How did you come of for the concept of combining Spaghetti Westerns with gothic horror?
"Priest" was conceived from *Blood*, an American PC game developed by Monolith Productions, Inc. The idea of a resurrected zombie as the protagonist totally fascinated me. Initially, I took the subject matter and began writing a novel, then later decided to draw it instead. In order to preserve the initial charm I experienced from the game's character, I avoided delving further into the character's imaginary world. From an early age, I've always loved Gothic Horrors and Spaghetti Westerns, and "Priest" was very conducive to both genres. It was rather an easy harmonization of both genres, and they naturally and seamlessly seeped into "Priest." (Of course, the game *Blood* was also created with a horror/western plot. Due to various reasons, both *Blood* and "Priest" are inseparably related.)

Reading "Priest," I'm amazed at how "Western" it feels. You did a remarkable job capturing the spirit of a Hollywood action movie. Were you influenced by movies in making "Priest?" Can you share any titles that influenced you?
The first Western that I accidentally came in contact with was Walter Hills' *The Long Riders*. I was never really interested in cowboy movies until I saw this movie, though you'd be hard pressed to call it a Spaghetti Western. After this movie, I slowly started getting into Spaghetti Westerns. As a result, I discovered and came to admire Sergio Leone's works and especially *Once Upon a Time in the West*. This movie has so profoundly influenced me that any work I do now or will do in the future will inevitably mirror its stylistic overtures.

The artwork in ""Priest"" is very different from other manwha I've seen. What were your influences?
"Hell Boy." The first time I saw this comic, I was blown away by its innovative and shocking style. To this day, I cannot forget that series.

How did you become a manwha artist? Did you have formal training?
No, I did not go through any general training course like other manwha artists. However, like these fellow manwha lovers, I did undergo a beginning course. And although I had considered manwha as a mere hobby, now in my late twenties, it has become an occupation.

In Korea, Japanese manga is quite popular, but I haven't heard about American comic books in Korea. Are American comic books readily available, and are you a fan? Are there any American comics in particular you like?

"FROM PRODUCTION TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, EVERYTHING IS VERY DIFFERENT."

American comics are very different from the manwha Koreans have enjoyed and are used to reading. From production, to character development, everything is very different. Therefore, in order for Korean manwha fans to enjoy American comics, American writers need to be mindful of their efforts (assuming that American writers desire to do so). Should we become exposed to American comics, through a long-term exchange, there is no doubt in my mind that American comics will become popular in Korea. I, of course, love American comics. Surprisingly the comics I read as a child were not Japanese manga but rather American comics. It all started with my Aunt and Uncle. My Uncle, who is American, would visit Korea with my Aunt and bring me American comic books. If I have to choose one, my current favorite would have to be "CREECH" by Greg Capullo.

"Priest" is currently being adapted into an online game by World Netgames. Are you involved with the development of the game? How closely does the game follow your manwha?
Making two publicity posters for this game was my only involvement. Although the subject matter for the game is from my manwha, the creation of the game was the creative work of

others. (I'm sure you can appreciate the irony. As you know my manwha was derived from the game *Blood* and to see my work being made back into a game is very surreal. This type of reciprocal action or interplay is something you would see in Hollywood. Case in point, a Japanese manga-ka, after watching Mad Max created Fist of the NorthStar, Hollywood, impressed with the manga, made a movie based on the manga. Although "Priest" and Fist of the NorthStar have been both heavily influenced and derived from their respective reciprocal works, they are undoubtedly new and different creative pieces of work.) The online "Priest" game has not yet arrived at the conclusion. Therefore, I obviously do not yet know what the differences are between my work and the game. The only thing I do know for sure is that my protagonist will not be in the game.

Do you have an end planned for "Priest?" What will be the final volume?
I've had some ideas for the ending but I'm not sure whether this ending will be feasible. I planned on ending the series at volume 25, but I'm not sure about that either. I'm not the methodical and prudent planner type.

What do you plan to work on when "Priest" is finished? Do you have any other manwha stories planned?
Warrior, cop, gangster, and skateboarding. I'm in the process of choosing from one of these subject matters. (I'm already in the process of developing a Warrior themed manwha in the U.S. through Image Comics).

Can you share any details on your project with Image?
I am currently working on the manwha through a joint publishing venture by a Korean and an American company. It's a work in progress, so I want to avoid mentioning anything about it. One thing I can mention is that the initial concept is completely in the style of American comics, however, beyond that, the style converts completely into my own.

The black and white artwork in "Priest" is very striking. You use negative space better than any other comic I've seen. Do you prefer working in the black and white medium? Would you be interested in working on a color series?
I really love those noisy black and white films with the distorted and elongated screen shots caused by dust and time. That is why I eliminated the margins, in order for "Priest" to give off a similar feel. I don't like tones. I don't like them because they are bothersome, annoying, and all those manwhas that use tones appear to be tied together by one personality. I think drawing colored manwhas are great, although, I have yet to find a coloring method that would portray my individual characteristics. However, I am looking into ways of solving this problem.

a game of the cloth

The *Priest* game (available for PC and Xbox from 3D Entertainment Corp.) can be played as a multi-player combat game, or an action-horror RPG, both of which take the old west game to the dark side of the paranormal. The grim ambience, reminiscent of Shadow Man, is surrounded by grim, violent game-play indicative of the manwha on which it is based, following the trials of Ivan Isaacs, a disillusioned former priest who sells his soul to the devil in order to battle the evil archangel Temozarela and stave off the end of the world as we know it.
If you are so inclined to serve Ivan these PC wares, you can dial up a little bad religion on the web at www.gamepriest.com.

MAXIMUM ISHIDA

Vocalist Yoko Ishida made her first visit to the United States this year as a special guest for Anime Expo. Ms. Ishida's melodious voice has provided the vocals for the most recent anime themes such as *Ai Yori Aoshi, Chitchana Yukitsukai Sugar* (*Tiny Snow Fairy Sugar*), and *Shin Shirayuki Hime Densetsu Prétear (New Snow White Legend Prétear)*. Her accomplished career can be traced back to her songs from the series *Sailormoon*, which anime fans may be well familiar with. Yoko Ishida was discovered by being the winner of the 4th annual Columbia Anime Singer contest, thus launching her career. Her debut came in 1993, with "Otome No Policy," the ending theme for the *Sailormoon R* series. After such a career-propelling run with *Sailormoon*, Ms. Ishida would eventually be signed to Pioneer LDC's music label. Since being with Pioneer LDC, her credits include being the featured vocalist for the "Para Para Max – The Power of new Animation Songs" CDs, and now recently the opening themes for some of Pioneer LDC's produced anime. With her career on the rise, it is foreseeable that her name will be acknowledged among many anime fans worldwide. During the festivities of Anime Expo, the beautiful and gifted Yoko Ishida granted us an interview to learn more about her music career, future plans, and what brought her toward choosing this career.

yoko ishida anime expo concert

yoko ishida interview

as told to **nelson lui**

How do you like Anime Expo so far?
The response that the audience gave me at opening ceremonies was very surprising, because in Japan you don't get that. Because I am positive and open-minded, I was very happy to receive such a response. This is only my first day as I just came in last night, so I haven't seen much yet. This is a first time for me, so I am trying to get to know more people and I'm enjoying it so far.

How exactly did you feel about the crowd response about your performance at Opening Ceremonies?
I can't speak English well, so I thought it would be hard to communicate, but there was always a great response to anything I said. The audience also screamed and applauded at every song that I sang. It was very surprising, and I'm very happy about that. Even when I just said, "Hello," I didn't expect to receive a response like that. [Laughs]

What inspired you to become a singer?
Actually, when I was small, I did not dream of becoming a singer. There was an opportunity to do a music audition through a magazine, I thought the prize was a trip to Australia. So I went to the audition and got the win. [Laughs]

Since being with Pioneer LDC label, you had a very successful tenure featuring the *Para-Para MAX* CDs. What inspired you to go back into providing vocals for anime themes?
Even in the *Para-Para MAX* CDs, it's still anime songs. In my mind, I'm still singing anime songs, just at a different rhythm. So to me, it's all anime songs from beginning to end so far.

Your taste in music seems to be wide, what do you usually listen to?
I listen to mostly Japanese pop, J-Pop stuff.

What is next for you musically?
I'm currently working on new songs and writing the lyrics by myself. So that's kind of a new challenge for me, and I'd like to involve myself more in creating music and compositions. I'd like to see my songs become one of Pioneer's anime songs.

Is there a possibility that you could grace us with your own full-length album anytime soon? Which is something I look forward to.

"ACTUALLY, WHEN I WAS SMALL, I DID NOT DREAM OF BECOMING A SINGER."

Right now, I have no plans for my own album, but I would like to see that happen next year. I will mention it to Pioneer LDC Japan since you guys have requested it. [Laughs]

Out of your three most recent recorded opening themes for *Pretear, Sugar* and *Ai Yori Aoshi*, which one of the three did you enjoy the most?
Those three songs are each totally different types, so it's hard to choose one.

Any plans of becoming a seiyuu [voice actor/actress]?
[Smiles] No.

Please tell us why.
I tried once before. The way I project voice for singing is totally different from the way I talk. My talking voice is kind of husky, and when I sing, it's a completely different voice, so that's one thing. The other thing is when I tried once before, I couldn't help but to see how professional other seiyuu are, and I thought to myself, I should study more if I want to be a seiyuu. I think I should stick to singing instead of trying to do voice acting.

Do you have anything special planned for the AX concert?
I will be singing songs from anime series that just started broadcasting in Japan – like Ai Yori Aoshi, which is very popular right now in Japan. So during the concert, it won't be just only Eurobeat/Para-Para MAX. This is a big thing compared to opening ceremonies.

Any plans of releasing one of your live performances on DVD?
A live performance DVD itself is not planned yet. I'm mostly singing in the studios, working with Pioneer LDC Japan, and promoting myself by coming to events like AX. I want to see how good of a response I'll receive from the audience, then we'll make a plan.

I've seen your Ai Yori Aoshi promotional video. Have you done any other promotional videos or music videos?
That was actually my first time.

Any plans on making more in the future?
I'm not sure. [Laughs] I think Pioneer LDC Japan will consider it. Just to let you know, I'm a first priority for Pioneer LDC Japan. After this whole event, we will make plans. So next year, maybe there will be more.

One last question: working with Toshio Masuda on *Ai Yori Aoshi*, how did it feel collaborating with a very talented musical director?
Mr. Masuda is a very creative person, and he complimented me on how I'm a cordial, nice person. I like to talk a lot and he likes to be creative with his projects, so we both had very creative communication. Thus, the working process was very productive. Mr. Masuda made the opening song after listening to my voice, so he knew it would be good for me.

ULTRA ANIMATION EUROBEAT SERIES: PARA-PARA BEST MAX

words cameron sampson

The Para Para dance culture has been trendy within the Japanese mainstream for the past few years. Combining the styles of traditional dance with Eurobeat set the dance standard with its vast popularity exhibited from Japanese dance clubs to bemani-branded machines. Pioneer LDC took notice of it, resulting in a release of a collection of *Para Para* CDs during 2001. The innovative idea of remixing anime themes into Para-Para style brought forth the *Para Para MAX* series.

Pioneer LDC's notion of Euro-mixing some of the more popular anime themes proved to be a worthwhile concept. The CDs are sampled in the true Eurobeat form – having multiple songs all combined into one full-track to maintain the continuous swapping of dance beats – withdrawing any doubts of authenticity. The vocals of every CD produced were provided by the talented Yoko Ishida. Ishida's harmonious voice maintains a qualified, fluid balance for each remixed anime theme, no matter the tune or twist.

In addition to the five-volume set of *Para Para MAX* CDs, there is also the "Bishoujo Max," and "Mecha Max" discs dedicated to themes from shoujo and mecha series. A limited-edition box set was also released to house the full collection of *Para Para MAX* CDs, along with a special video available displaying the techniques of Para Para.

Even those unfamiliar to *Para Para* or *Eurobeat* will find themselves drawn to the catchy uptempo beats, while enjoying their favorite anime tunes, as they really are not subject towards *Para Para* devotees only. The dance mixed anime songs divulge tunes that are overall uniquely entertaining and enjoyable to listen.

artificial

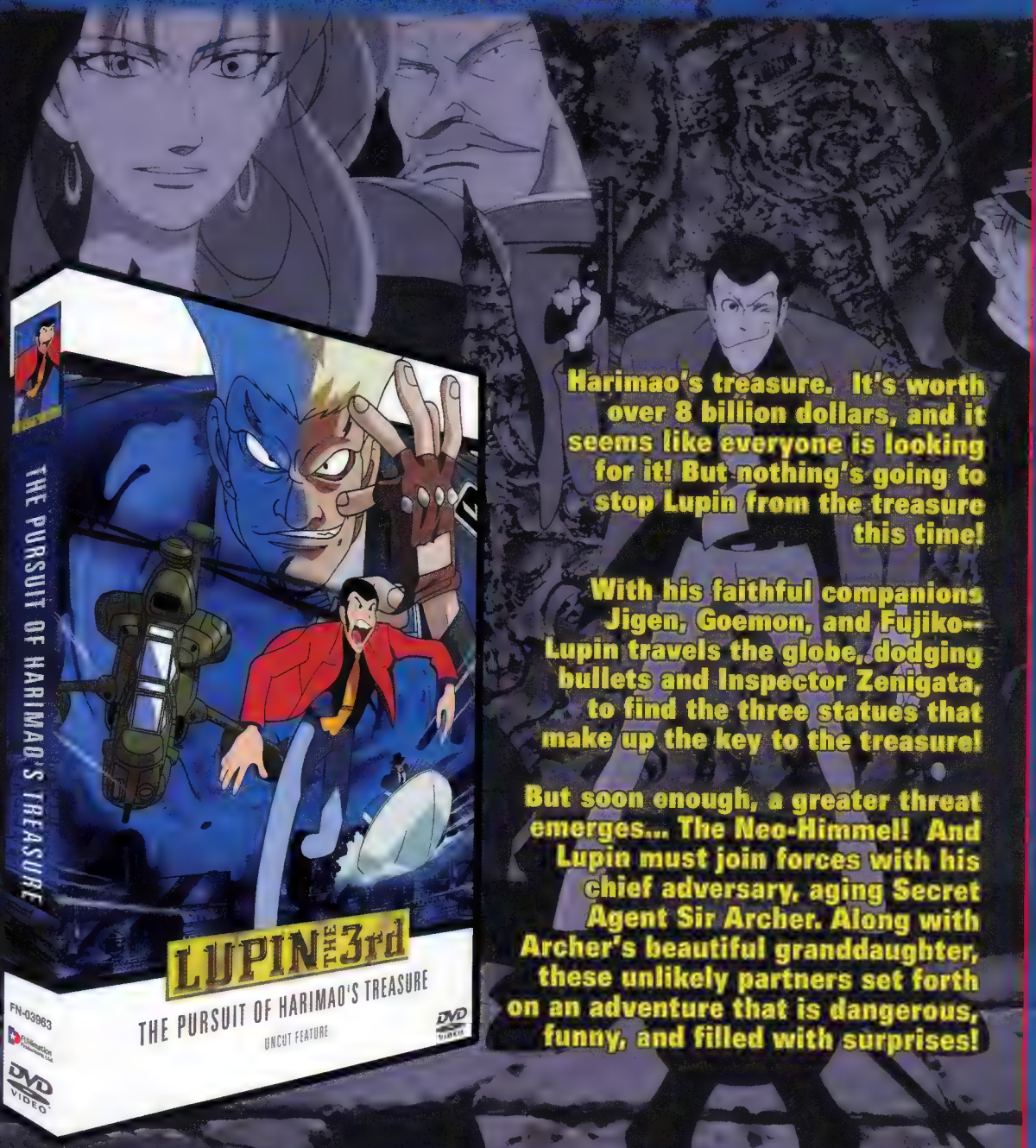
but not intelligent...

:: sideshow toys and collectibles...

There are toys, and then there are collectibles. When it comes to the latter, look no further then Sideshow toys, located on the web at www.sideshowtoy.com. Even where collectibles are concerned, Sideshow takes it to the next level, with finely sculpted facial features, authentic clothes, and on some of the finer non-articulated pieces, a truly exquisite level of detail. If you're looking for *Lord of the Rings* memorabilia as majestic as the film, look no further. I pat my *Dark Crystal* figures on their cute little heads on my way to the John each and every morning. You can do the same for less than you probably think. Do dial them up on the web for these and more fine collectibles.

"Lupin even out-Bonds James Bond himself... Add up all the action, intrigue, adventure and hilarity, and you've got an anime series unlike any other. Lupin's been on our Most Wanted list for years. He should be on yours too."

Anime Invasion - June 2002



Harimao's treasure. It's worth over 8 billion dollars, and it seems like everyone is looking for it! But nothing's going to stop Lupin from the treasure this time!

With his faithful companions Jigen, Goemon, and Fujiko-- Lupin travels the globe, dodging bullets and Inspector Zenigata, to find the three statues that make up the key to the treasure!

But soon enough, a greater threat emerges... The Neo-Himmel! And Lupin must join forces with his chief adversary, aging Secret Agent Sir Archer. Along with Archer's beautiful granddaughter, these unlikely partners set forth on an adventure that is dangerous, funny, and filled with surprises!

LUPIN THE 3rd™

AVAILABLE ON DVD & VHS SEPTEMBER 24

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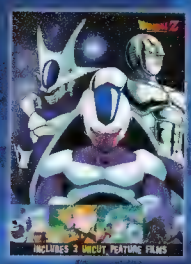

DBZ BOX SET
Movies 4, 5 & 6
Available
October 15
on
DVD & VHS

Yu-Gi-Oh!
The Heart of Cards &
Into the Hornets Nest
Available
Sept. 24
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DVD & VHS

Blue Gender
Volumes 6 & 7
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Yu Yu Hakusho
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Seven Ways To Die
Available
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DVD & VHS

Fruits Basket
A Great Transformation
Available
October 29
on DVD

play MEDIA

review legend

perfect
stellar
great
good
average
poor

BLADE II

NEW LINE
RATED R

movie
dvd

"I miss the sweat in action *and* in porn. Nobody sweats anymore," director Guillermo del Toro chuckles on the commentary track for *Blade II*. It's true. Action movies tend to fall short in all facets nowadays, especially when it concerns their most important element: action. Count the seconds. In an average action flick, a fight sequence generally lasts for 30 to 45 seconds—that's all. If the clock runs over a minute, it's a godsend. But in *Blade II*, del Toro addresses that very trend. Each of his adrenaline-dripping, blood-drenched action sequences linger much longer than any punches that Schwarzenegger ever threw. And even better, unlike the first *Blade*, each scene is progressively more dynamic than the last (the original had that amazing techno-club collision between the day-walker and a slew of vamps; but nothing ever topped it). Another plus: A beefed-up budget has allowed for more advanced special effects to be deployed, like the L-Cam, a nifty camera gadget that allows certain shots to be woven together digitally (the exact same technique used to seamlessly weave those web-slinging, city-swinging moments in *Spider-Man* as a whole). Plus, the film's relentless "f—k you" attitude overloads the cinematic sundae with cherries. Blade (Wesley Snipes) is no longer an emotionally driven creature of the night; there's no more mother issues in tow. Instead, he's eager to pounce on the most vicious of undead, whether the slaughtering occurs by way of his sword or by jamming their bodies into a ray of sunlight. *Blade II* is basically a rock concert of brutality, sewn together with little bits of gadget jive (with Whistler returning as the resident techno geek), vampire subculture (a new breed of bloodsuckers, the Reapers, are introduced), and an unlikely pairing (The Bloodpack, a group of merciless hunters, joins sides with Blade to hunt the more powerful foe). Del Toro even adds his signature touch of gore, giving the audience a glance inside the inner-workings of one of the Reapers, as well as something you don't see too often: the slice of a severed face winking at the camera.

VALUE: Del Toro and producer Peter Frankfurt join forces on an extremely entertaining commentary track, discussing everything from the niceties of the horror genre to the aforementioned blinking head. Then star/co-producer Wesley Snipes and writer/co-producer David S. Goyer offer more on-set anecdotes on a second track. The "On the Set" offering is a collection of six sequences from the movie, together with the screenplay, storyboards, special effects breakdowns and footage of del Toro waving his magic cinematic wand as the cameras roll. Also, two featurettes—"Stuntmen" and "The Digital Maw"—are short but sweet glances at the process of creating the film's elaborate CGI. There's also 25 minutes of deleted scenes, introduced by del Toro (even though he describes them as pure shit), a "Notebooks" section, an art gallery, and more. There's definitely lots of sweat here.

JON M GIBSON

DINOTOPIA

ARTISAN/HALLMARK ENT.
NOT RATED

movie
dvd

Dinotopia is probably the best made-for-TV movie *ever*, simply because it's so massive. The story is ridiculously large, translating into a small-screen epic that's six hours long—not exactly a dinner-and-movie undertaking. Featuring an amazing amount of visual effects and some of the most inventive, beautiful sets ever created, the *mega*-series tells of two teenage boys marooned on a lost island where humans and dinosaurs have learned to live together. They're forced to become Dinotopians themselves, adapting to a foreign culture and lifestyle. And while the movie is pretty intriguing and fun, it's *long*. *Incredibly* long. *Ungodly* long. Which isn't bad, but after a while, *Dinotopia* becomes less of something to enjoy and more of something to endure.

VALUE: There's a lot on this two-disc set for being a TV movie, but nothing that's more than run-of-the-mill. The interview with composer Trevor Jones does manage to engage the viewer and is the only feature that doesn't feel specifically peddled to children. *Dinotopia*'s making-of featurette is on par, but sometimes it explains more of the story you just watched than it does how the movie was crafted. An animated photo gallery, storyboard-to-scene comparison and trailers for other made-for TV movies finish the package, but aren't all that interesting. The features don't really deliver.

PHIL HORNSHAW

GREMLINS

WARNER BROS.
RATED PG

movie
dvd

Gizmo is a legend in his own right. Sure, he may be secondary to the Muppets, but he still deserves some attention. Luckily, Warner Bros. had that in mind when crafting this fairly extensive special edition of 1984's *Gremlins*. The film shows a bit of age, but it still maintains its wildly imaginative flair. For the uninitiated—which there probably aren't many, considering *Gremlins* is rerun on cable at least once a week—it's about the quirky discovery of that furry creature pictured above (yes, Gizmo) and the evil that lurks inside. Getting him wet or feeding him after midnight will cause nasty, slimy, green monsters to spawn from bubbles on his back. The aptly named gremlins are creatures with only one visible urge: complete destruction. It's a really gratifying, fantastical ride.

VALUE: Along with 10 minutes of deleted scenes, there are two audio commentaries that recollect the primary cast and crew (One features director Joe Dante and stars Phoebe Cates, Zach Galligan, Dick Miller, and Howie Mandel; the second: Dante returns with producer Michael Finnell and special effects supervisor Chris Walas). The film is now 20 years old, so the alternate audio tracks act as more of a retrospective than a true "making-of" blast (but there are definitely some funny special effects related anecdotes). A storyboard gallery and some trailers round out the package.

JON M GIBSON

NEWSBYTES

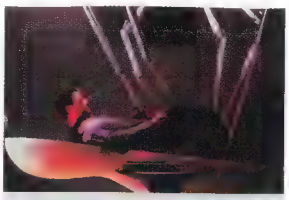
edited by thomas chau

. . . RED UNDERWEAR VS. HARD NIPPLES: Wolfgang Petersen (*The Perfect Storm*) has announced plans to bring *Batman vs. Superman* to the screen for a possible 2004 release, in which Batman and Superman will clash over different crime-fighting philosophies rather than who can kick the other's ass. The current draft of the script is being penned by Andrew Kevin Walker (*Se7en*) . . . **BRAD PITT FOR GEEKS:** After high budget concerns for almost a year, Darren Aronofsky's sci-fi project *The Fountain* has received the greenlight from Warner Bros. The project will star Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, and is described by *Variety* as "a journey of one man (Pitt) in the present, as well as both 500 years in the past and into the future." . . . **BETTER NEVER THAN NOW:** Paul Anderson (*Resident Evil*) has been brought in to rewrite the script for *Aliens vs. Predator*. The project based on the videogame, which has been in "develop-

Hellboy unleashed: The teaser poster.

IMPOSTER

DIMENSION
RATED R



movie
dvd

Imposter is the poor man's *Minority Report*. The exact story elements may differ a bit, but the basics are there: Both films are about mis-identity in a futuristic template, both are based on short stories by master sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick, and both contain lots and lots of running. Specifically, though, the plot quickly marks scientist Spencer Olham (Gary Sinise) as an "imposter," an organic alien replicant that's apparently on a course to assassinate one of Earth's most controversial government officials. But Olham is flustered; he knows he's real. So rather than die in the interrogation chair, he runs to prove himself innocent. There are some twists and turns along the way, but ultimately the movie can't escape cliché sci-fi convention. With a proper budget and a tighter script, it would have succeeded. But for flying so far below the box office radar—making essentially no money—*Imposter* definitely makes due with limited resources. Some beautiful special effects shots from ILM and creative set design are hidden in this mess of mediocrity.

VALUE: Apparently, *Imposter* was originally set to be in a series of Dimension-funded short films based in futuristic worlds, so the original 50-minute short is included as a bonus. Ironically, it's much better and more concise than the full-pledged feature—too bad.

JON M GIBSON

RESIDENT EVIL

COLUMBIA/TRISTAR
RATED R

movie
dvd

Ahh, the videogame movie—a risky venture for filmmakers, no matter the topic. *Double Dragon*, *Street Fighter*, and most recently, *Final Fantasy*, all fell into the desolate pit of mediocrity; *Resident Evil*, on the other hand, manages to hover above the rest. Needless to say that it's basically an electric, apocalyptic remix of *Dawn of the Dead*, this zombie flick pulls out all the flashy visual tricks to consume the audience. Milla Jovovich (*The Fifth Element*), trotting around in a clingy cocktail dress, plays an amnesia-suffering military chick that finds her way—along with a handful of other gun-totting hard-asses—into the hi-tech caverns of the Umbrella Corp's secret experimentation facility. Before long, the group becomes stalled by some nasty flesh-gnawing undead types. Director Paul W.S. Anderson (*Event Horizon*) brings a hip visual style to the project; and composers Marco Beltrami and Marilyn Manson stir in their own brand of razor-sharp music.

VALUE: The audio commentary is a fun "dirty talk" session with Anderson, producer Jeremy Bolt and actors Jovovich and Michelle Rodriguez. It's purely mindless; they quickly find themselves mocking the movie's ad campaign and Rodriguez's inability to pronounce Milla's last name (yo-vo-vhich). And in mid-commentary, Milla's dog shits on the recording studio floor. The 10-minute "Scoring *Resident Evil*" is a cool trip, too.

JON M GIBSON

SUPER TROOPERS

FOX SEARCHLIGHT
RATED R

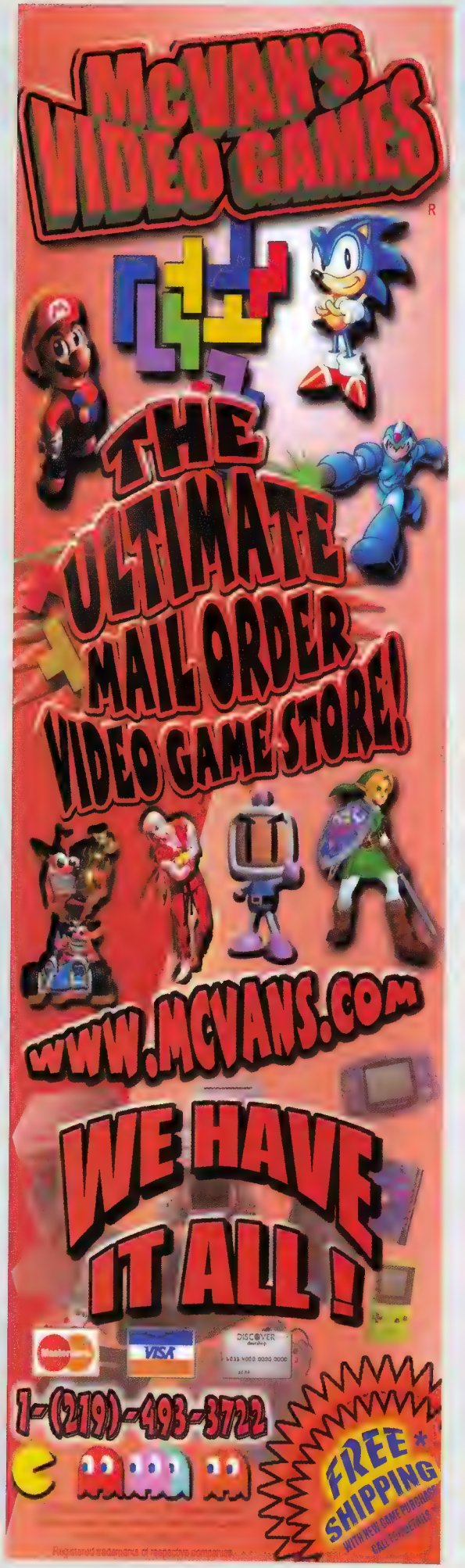
movie
dvd

The Broken Lizard comedy troupe's first attempt at a movie is *supposed* to be funny. It's also *supposed* to be about a group of highway patrollers who engage in crazy antics and other *supposedly* hilarious things; they stage high-speed chases, play with the minds of stoned teenagers, and generally cause havoc to ease their own boredom. Now, the idea behind *Super Troopers* is that all these things ought to be funny, but they fall short—short like a lawn dart thrown by a monkey with no hands. *Super Troopers* spends a whole lot of time trying to be funny but never even accomplishes a chuckle. The jokes are stretched *far* beyond their limitations, giving new meaning to the wonderfully descriptive adjective *lackluster*. Even the worst episodes of *Saturday Night Live* are funnier than this.

VALUE: Every single useless scene that was cut from the movie is salvaged for the DVD—but that's not necessarily a good thing. Because while there are a million extended scenes and outtakes, they aren't any funnier than what *is* in the movie, and there certainly aren't any more worth seeing. The feature and deleted scene commentary drags as well. There just wasn't a whole lot to be said about the movie. It's like somebody forgot to tell Broken Lizard that their DVD, like their movie, is *supposed* to be funny or at least slightly interesting.

PHIL HORNSHAW

ment hell" for several years now, may finally get off the ground. And why not? With the smashing box-office successes of *Alien: Resurrection* and *Predator 2*, it's sure to be a cool money making scheme (note the sarcasm) . . . **HORNY DEVIL:** The silver screen adaptation of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* comic book has been rushed into pre-production. Uber-fanboy Guillermo del Toro (*Blade II*) is attached as director and Ron Perlman will star as The Horned One. The film is scheduled for a 2004 release (at left: an exclusive teaser debuted at the San Diego Comic-Con) . . . **DIESES IST WOLFENSTEIN!** Columbia Pictures has announced plans to produce a *Wolfenstein* film based on the classic videogame by id Software. For those of you living in a cave, the premise of the game placed an Army Ranger in the stronghold of a Nazi prison, where he is forced to take any means necessary to escape . . . **For more filmic newsbytes, go to www.cinemaconfidential.com** . . .



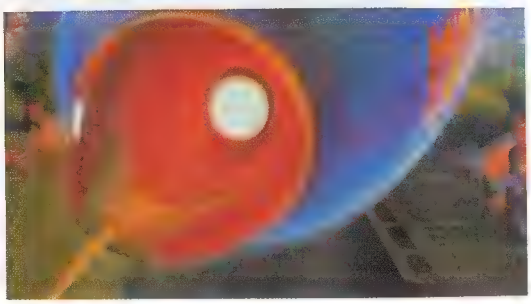
IDOL BLABBER

Jimmy Neutron

Bent on an urge to take apart his mother's toaster and build a planetary satellite out of it, **Jimmy Neutron** has rightfully earned his nickname "boy genius." Now the star of his first intergalactic, silver screen adventure—and soon to be weekly misadventures on Nickelodeon—he's skyrocketing into Powerpuff-similar fame. But he's not the type of child star to get an inflated ego; he just wants to keep toying with the plethora of gadgets in his secret underground lab (and the *superstar* paychecks are simply deposited back into his "deconstruction" fund). Although he wouldn't reveal his next hyper-invention, Neutron took a break from oiling his robotic dog Goddard to fill in a few tech-primed sentences.

words jon m gibson

Girls... "are unexplainable by modern science.."



In one word, *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* is... divertimento (Português for "fun")

In two words, *Jimmy Neutron* is... Junge Genie (German for "Boy Genius")

Being such a clever little guy... is helpful at dinner because you can invent disappearing peas.

But being a computer-generated 'toon has is great because... you get to stay a kid forever!

The worst experience I've ever had with a turbo-charged jetpack was when... one jet goes out and you're trapped flying in a tight circle pattern.

Snuffing out an entire alien race loses its excitement when... you have to come into the house for dinner.

Besides holding my hair in a towering curl, hairspray is also useful for... locking the molecular structure of cell-derived motor neurons.

Not wearing a helmet while traveling in space often results in... much better views—I hate looking through helmet glass.

Having a really big head... can make you fall when you bend over to tie your shoes.

Albert Einstein... My hero; Edison is a close second, but Einstein beats him out because he had much funnier hair.

Albert Szent-Györgyi... won the Nobel Prize in 1937 for his discoveries in biological combustion, vitamin C and fumaric acid—and I hear he was a lot of fun at parties.

Captain Picard... really rocks—and also sounds curiously like the Yokian ruler, King Goobot.

Girls... are unexplainable by modern science.

My next über-invention will... replace the earth's crust with a springy material so we can all jump really high.

Suggested: Always make friends with the chubby, hungry, four-eyed kid so... you can have a very close, great best friend, er, that you can also run experiments and test inventions on.

The best way to cover up electrical burns is... Insta-Skin 5000, a liquid candy-based skin-colored spray, providing protection as well as a handy, yummy snack.

Having a closet full of the same T-shirt... simplifies one's morning dressing procedure.

Robotic dogs tend to... leak oil on the carpet, getting me in trouble.

Losing the Oscar to *Shrek* for "Best Animated Feature Film"... was okay, I guess. At first I was kind of mad and was going to go TP his shack, but then I realized I can make my head green too if I want. Oh, and Goddard loves that donkey.

But if we *did* win, the celebration might have gone something like... Goddard transforming into a boom box with built in disco ball, then dancing and candy all around!

A kitchen toaster is to an intergalactic satellite as an industrial strength microwave is to... a tele-transportation device

The most inappropriate use for a shrink ray is... tiny gorillas—they're fun!

Whenever you're on the verge of complete planetary destruction, always remember... to brush.

"At least it's coming out of the attic, not the basement" is a catchphrase that should be used *only* when referring to... Jason.

But it could also be applied when... you had too many mini-burritos.

Seeing as it's rated G, something we absolutely couldn't say in the movie was... "Look, I'm running with nuclear scissors!"

It's gonna be tough when puberty finally hits because... then I'm probably gonna like Cindy—yecch!

If my last name were Photon or Electron... my first name would be Pete or Eddie.

In two words, *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* is... beaucoup d'amusement! (French for "Much fun!")

In one word, *Jimmy Neutron* is... affamato! (Italian for "hungry!")

RESEVOIR REVIVED

words ion

Keanu Reeves will be forever immortalized for taking "the red pill" in *The Matrix*; Edward Norton beat the shit out of himself in *Fight Club*; and **Michael Madsen** drenched *that* cop in gasoline and cut off his ear. The movie: *Reservoir Dogs*. The occasion: Quentin Tarantino's contemporary classic—chock full of edgy dialogue and gritty violence—just turned ten years old. To commemorate, Mr. Blonde talks gangsters, guns, and *Grand Theft Auto*.

"WE WERE JUST TRYIN' TO MAKE A COOL MOVIE AND WE WERE ALL TRYIN' TO PLAY COOL GUYS."

So what is it about Tarantino that turns you on—his movies aren't too clean?
All I can say is, when I read *Reservoir Dogs*, and when I read *True Romance*, and when I read *Natural Born Killers*, I realized that Quentin has a certain style a writing that has to do with a very bizarre combination of violence and humor and human behavior. It's all put together with everyone's memory of entertainment and the way that it's been done—with episodic television and the way violence has been presented to the American public. No one's ever been able to have that combination, and I think that he has a strange way of putting his signature on things that no one else have really been able to do.

Any memorable anecdotes from the making of *Dogs*?
I don't think any of us realized what we were doing at the time. We were just tryin' to make a cool movie and we were all tryin' to play cool guys. And everyone was really enamored working with Harvey [Keitel]. I remember once, Tim Roth, having been lying in the blood all day, and myself, after having been shot and in the blood. We had embraced each other at the end of the day and became stuck together. And the wardrobe girl had to hose us off like a couple of dogs. [Laughs] **play**

BLADE II
New Line
September 3

BLOODY OPERA

words jon m gibson

Guillermo del Toro is obsessed with the horrific—bloody organs, exposed guts, and other instruments of gore. He found a way to blend his crimson fascination into *Mimic*, *Cronos* and *The Devil's Backbone*; and now with *Blade II*, he melds that same sense of terror with the action genre. Some would argue his approach is gratuitous, but his visuals are much more strategic than that. In his carnage-drenched sequel to the original *Blade*, del Toro goes as far as dissecting a Reaper, an evolved race of vampire, and showcasing the inner-workings of the bloodsucker. But the apt director never strays from his focus, either. *Blade II* is the finest "popcorn" action flick you'll see this year and Del Toro isn't afraid to admit it.

"[AN ACTION MOVIE] DOESN'T NEED TO APOLOGIZE TO ANYONE; IT'S JUST PURE CANDY."

You're a fan of pop culture—videogames, cartoons, anime—so do you always try to bring the best of *all* worlds to your films?
Del Toro: They are each a different creature. In the case of *Devil's Backbone*, my visual references were more classical, more academic. Whereas *Blade* has an enormous pop sensibility. It has a lot in common with stuff that more academic structures consider negative commentaries. A lot of people say, in a disrespectful way, that something looks like a videogame or a cartoon to deface it. And I'm absolutely sure that the people that say that have *never* in their life played a videogame and the last cartoon they saw was *Tom and Jerry*.

Totally... the critics are generally the *un*educated. It seemed like you were almost trying to mock the anti-violence movement in media by making the hyper-violence so toon-like.
I think that everything that is discussed [in regards to violence in the media]—most of the time—is a half analysis. And I must say, from both sides. The easiest thing to do is blame things on the culture, [but] there are as many crimes inspired by the Catholic church. [Laughs at the irony] It's just so easy to blame it on the media, because we are so horrified to take responsibility. The tragedy of our youth right now is not the excess of action movies with violent content; it's the lack of parenting.

What caused you to transition *Blade II* into a more horrific flick instead of straight-on action like the original?
I think that it was just inevitable the moment I walked in the room that it would turn into that. For the action guys that loved the first one, I tried to procure a *very* fluid, *very* funny, *very* lively type of action. The movie has more horror, yes—but is also has more humor. And it's a little more nimble, and a little less brooding.

Like when Blade would pounce in the first movie, the camera would shake.
Yeah, and Blade was tormented. He's not playing Hamlet in this one. [Chuckles] He is fully enjoying his kick-ass mode.

On that "kick-ass" note, you've been known to say "more *is* more." It's obvious you adhered to that philosophy since *Blade II* has adrenaline that just doesn't stop—a "f—k you" attitude that just keeps on pumping.
I *hate* when in an action movie they try to spoon feed me Syd Field 101 character moments. [An action movie] doesn't need to apologize to anyone; it's just pure candy. It's a sugar rush. We're not pretending it's f—king tofu!

You're without a doubt a comic-book fan, and now you're working on the live-action adaptation for *Hellboy*.
I've been working on it since I finished *Mimic* and feeling that this was the perfect movie to express very *personal* things for me, but at the same time, make an entertainment movie. Right now, if you see my movies, they are divided in a very schizophrenic way between personal movies and big commercial movies. And I think that *Hellboy* was the possibility of reconciling them both. [*Hellboy*] is the comic book that has affected me the most by returning me to be a drooling geek of eight years old. When I started reading *Hellboy*, I was like a kid again—I was like, "What is gonna happen?" I needed a fix. **play**

LORD OF DOGTOWN

words jon m gibson

Over the last few years, skateboarding has gained a lot of momentum in the mainstream—it's not just a street hobby anymore; it's an international phenomenon. But skate legend **Tony Alva**—professional boarder and owner of skate supplier ALVA (www.alvaskateboards.com)—argues that it comes and goes "every ten years." Now, with the release of the documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, the origin of the sport is finally revealed for the masses. The movement didn't start with Tony Hawk; it traces all the way back to the days of disco. Alva clarifies.

"...LOTS OF PEOPLE THINK SKATEBOARDING STARTED WITH TONY HAWK."

Do you ever miss the days of clay wheels?
Alva: Occasionally, though the urethane wheels sure make the terrain a lot easier to ride. Oh, and one of my friends actually has a band named Clay Wheels. [Laughs]

When you look a skating now vs. the era of drained swimming pools and homemade boards, do you see anything lacking?
As a matter of fact, the places that we've been skating lately are very versatile—the terrain, they're all made out of concrete, so they're gonna last for quite a while. I think that the skatepark is going to be a part of the scene for quite a while. There's pretty minimal maintenance—basically, all they have to do is blow the dust out and make sure that the wear and tear on the cooping is [maintained]. Everything is built really well, so it lasts ten to 20 years easily.

Once people see *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, what will they come out thinking?
Basically, it's like a wakeup call, because lots of people think skateboarding started with Tony Hawk. So when they see not just the historical significance, but also the effect that it's had on the youth culture, it opens people's eyes to where the foundation for modern skateboarding came from.

Well, it seems that the culture of Dogtown really became a movement—but not just in So-Cal, but the world over.
You see it everywhere you go now—the lifestyle and influence that came from that area. You can go to Australia, you can go to Tokyo, Japan, you can go to London, England. The surf-style skate culture—I think that was the beginning of when people started to take skateboarding to another level. And, of course, the terrain that we sought out is being simulating in a lot of these skateboard parks, too.

What was the time frame from when you guys started skating during the Dogtown movement to when it became extremely popular?
It came and went every ten years. The mid to late 70s—that was the epicenter when skateboarding was really popular, not only through the media, but also the fact that there were millions of kids around the world that it was a phenomenon for. The advent of urethane wheels and other equipment that they were designing back then was finally shooting to the level that you could use it to safely skate *radical* terrain. Like, what you were talking about before with clay wheels: That was a dangerous era to be involved in skating. [Laughs] Clay wheels, steel wheels and homemade boards were known to fall apart if you hit a rock—you'd just get pitched off your board. The mid-to-late-70s was a special era; it's gone to a totally different level now.

When you sat on the beach, watching the waves and surfers, did you ever expect to live the life of a "rock star"?
Well, not as a kid I didn't, but as I got older there was a potential not only to market myself with the design of my logo and my own skateboard company, that I had the ability to actually go out and focused on being a professional skateboarder. Yeah, sometimes it crosses over into that crazy rockstar lifestyle, but I keep it—especially with my company—pretty grassroots. I'm not a glitz 'n' glam kind of guy.

What's the world like through Tony Alva's eyes? Do you walk around shopping malls thinking the escalator might make for an awesome instrument for a trick?
[Laughs] No, not really. I'm just another one of the guys out there skatin' and having a good time.

So what's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning—is your life force linked to the board?
A lot of times, I'll get up and I'll go surfing first thing in the morning, then work during the day, and skate later in the afternoon. **play**

BASTARD SAMURAI
Image (ongoing series)
Available Now

SWORDPLAY

words jon m gibson

[illegible] is a [illegible] of action. [illegible] to [illegible] or [illegible] to stra[illegible], [illegible] take[illegible] he's [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Sex, sin and swordplay: Bastard Samurai is fearless in its execution of all three.

"AFTER *GHOST DOG*, IT CAME TOGETHER PRETTY QUICKLY IN MY HEAD."

of it, and the colors are just part of it—but I tried to come with the artwork, even in the color usage.

Some would compare the look of Bastard to Bruce Timm's look-style. Are any of you guys inspired by Mr. Batman's look?

Mike: Sure, we all love Timm's Batman, but we're also very inspired by manga books.

Mike: It's more a case of his fans; this was in Japan's anime range than the drawing style.

Kelsey: I'm sure he's an influence in there somewhere, but it wasn't a conscious, "Let's make this book look like Bruce Timm."

The comic-book industry is a kingdom of nerd. Each of you must have that special place—whether it's memory or nature—where you inevitably travel.

Mike: I get inspiration from everything around me.

Kelsey: I'm a freelancer, so I just absorb anything, everything, inside, outside. There's such a lot of bad stuff that has something of value. There's just so much information out there in existence and I use my ears for a living.

It's easy to spot that movies are probably the greatest inspiration for *Bastard*—there's a cinematic pulse to every panel, on every page. Is this your way of exploding the action flick onto the printed medium?

Mike: Totally. That's what we go for. We love to take and form it and it like that.

Mike: Movies are a big part of it, but so are videogames. Particularly with games like Resident Evil and Silent Hill, the Castlevania and Metal Gear Solid stuff. Those games are making a really cool shift in the way they're telling their stories.

Kelsey: Of course. Gaming is more widespread in mainstream than anything when considering Doom 3 trailer movies.

Is it difficult to strike that balance between the visceral and the dialogue?

Mike: No, because Mike is so right in not the visuals. He writes insane pages for David and Jose.

Mike: It's a collaboration that we pretty much all of it by ourselves or the words. That is how the Japanese do it and I think it's one of the reasons comics can be expressed a little better.

Kelsey: Mike is really, really good to work with because I'm familiar with anyway. He's about one step ahead of me. I keep up and I'm only there now to bear. Laughter. He's a bit of a tit to work with because he's very—a lot of times, actions that he's just typing a series of words. But being a script is also creating circumstances for the characters, and that's where you—it's more than just words.

Kelsey, you've actually had a taste of both worlds—film and comics. Compare and contrast the mediums: *Jimmy Neutron vs. Bastard Samurai.*

Kelsey: Working on Jimmy Neutron was different because I had no creative control. I had to say yes to anything. If they say they want an ocean or a space ship, you'll have to artwork as all the average crew, and I have to go on and on and do what you're told. Comics, especially like *Bastard*, Tommy and I have more control because there's more people involved. I think you get a more mature.

Personally, I've found myself applying music to everything I do—electronica tape or I walk down hallways, jimmy rock pennies during those near-collision awkward moments. What's the soundtrack to this book?

Mike: For me, as much and I was listening, KOOL [illegible] Japanese music.

Mike: Much of our Tommy's Armageddon is Jon's theme. Tommy is Fantomas' score all the time with Mr.

Kelsey: Soundtrack and Tool, and a lot of [illegible]

My favorite thing right now that's really weird—the song is the soundtrack to Kary Bean.

It's obvious that *Bastard* is trying a lot of new things in the comic book world. One of 'em is the five-page quickie storyline after the main action. What brought that on?

Mike: Just the ripping off Marvel again. It's the greatest comic ever and they've had a full back up.

Mike: It's a fun opportunity for experimentation.

Now, be honest. Everything you say is confidential. I'm a licensed therapist. Is Mike a stone driver—does he crack the whip?

Mike: I have to use the one whip I'm using. I'm not. I told something else.

Mike: Mike is great. The work has been a warm up for all of us on [illegible] work.

Kelsey: Yes, he does. Laughs. He's very relaxed, we [illegible] and I'm a Texas Ranger.

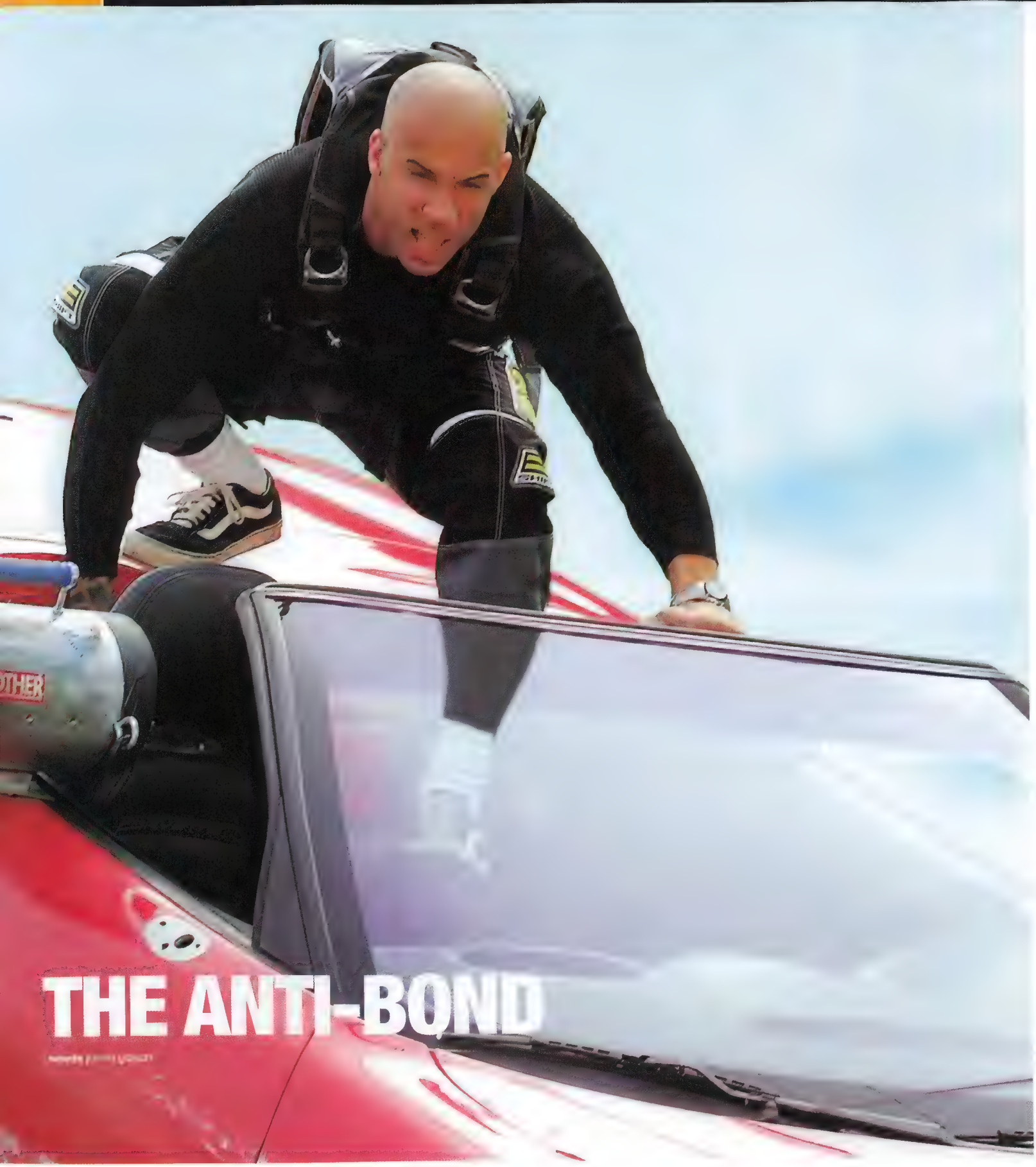
Okay, by it be me. What's the dumb sign of samurai-Sucks—or at least those starring some sort of blockbuster movie?

Mike: Well, Seven Samurai is a big one of mine. On my latest and is a really weird one where Lethal Weapon 4 is [illegible] Evil Dead.

Mike: I like Shogun Assassin. The Blind Swordsman's Revenge and Yojimbo.

Kelsey: One of my favorites is the movie Fortress by Kurosawa. It's weird that there's a big romance. That was based on movie types by Kurosawa, **play**

XXX
Sony
IN THEATERS NOW



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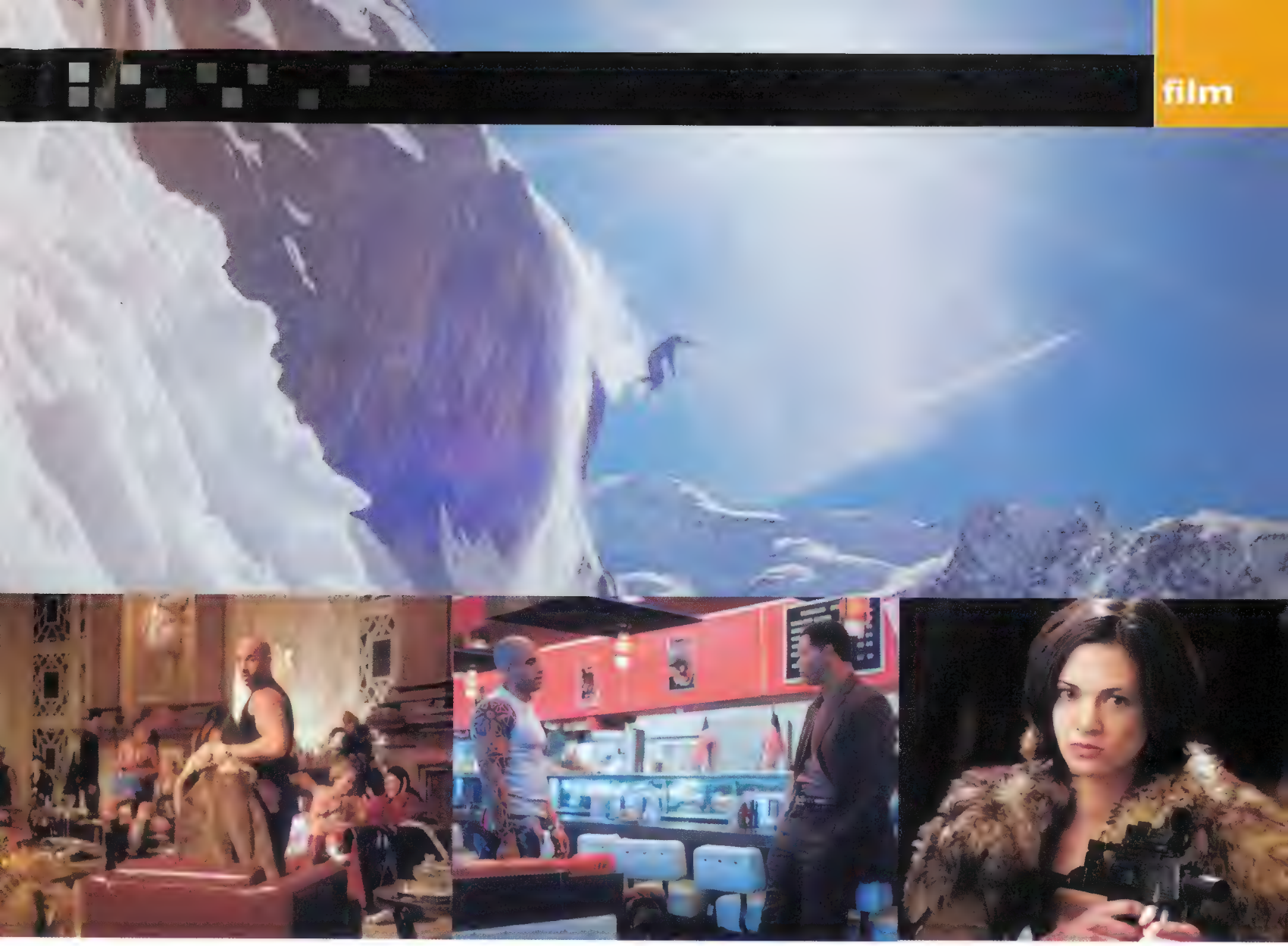


"I like to uncork something *really* big *very* soon," director Rob Cohen admits, "like the highway truck-jacking in *The Fast and the Furious*. This way, the audience feels like they're getting their money's worth, and can sit back and really enjoy the rest of the ride."

But his latest action flick, an adrenaline-soaked crack at the reinvention of the secret agent genre, *XXX*, never really offers that "sit back" sense of calm—it's a challenge to even find one scene where the action isn't moving at the speed of a stockcar. The rush: 200 miles per hour, engine revved and wheels burning; and it *never* stops to refill. Take the film's anti-authoritarianism exhibitionist, Xander Cage (Vin Diesel)—branded with the ultimate calling card for the extreme, a triple-X tattoo needled on to the back of his neck—as the perfect example. His surprise birthday bash, secluded in his funky downtown loft, plays host to every invert-crazy sports star on the globe—skate icon Tony Hawk, BMX staple Mat Hoffman, motocross maniac Brian Deegan, and fistfuls of others. That party is like Cage's life: one massive trick—without a helmet. His high-trafficked website pays all his expensives; credit card numbers are plugged in ceaselessly by visitors eager to see digital videos of what the stunt-mad defiant did on his weekend (sky-surfing, bridge-jumping, free-climbing—every endorphin-primed activity is an option).

"Xander is a rebel without a clue," Cohen insists. "He is going no place fast, but he's a man of great skills, which comes to the attention of Agent Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) of the National Security Agency. And therein lies the plot," being the first chapter of a blister-worn, death-defying secret agent franchise for the generation that isn't patient enough for Bond. *XXX* isn't about the suave, slow burn of "shaken not stirred" martinis; Cage is a die-hard for high-proof hard liquor, heavy metal thrashes, and dark-haired femme fatales. And like all good spy thrillers, Cage's adversity adopts a techno edge: "Heroes or anti-heroes are defined by the villain," Cohen adds. "If that mountain isn't steep enough, the hero's climb just feels empty." Appropriately, *XXX* isn't about light bruising; in Cage's clash with Prague's most notorious gang of thugs, Anarchy 99, a landfill of bloody corpses is only the appetizer. The action, by all accounts, is relentless.

Producer Neal H. Moritz emphasizes: "*XXX* is an e-ticket ride like [you've] never seen before."

"*XXX* ISN'T ABOUT THE SUAVE, SLOW BURN OF 'SHAKEN NOT STIRRED' MARTINIS; CAGE IS A DIE-HARD FOR HIGH-PROOF HARD LIQUOR, HEAVY METAL THRASHES, AND DARK-HAIRED FEMME FATALES."

Director Rob Cohen aims his camera during a high-octane action sequence.

HARVEY BIRDMAN: ATTORNEY AT LAW
Cartoon Network
Sundays, 11:00-11:15PM (et/pt)

WHO IS HARVEY BIRDMAN?

words by [illegible] gibson

NAME: "Harvey Birdman."
DATE OF BIRTH: "May 1967."
BIRTHPLACE: "NBC."
OCCUPATION: "Superhero cum attorney."
CLAIM TO FAME: "Solar powered—before there were tax incentives."
LAW SCHOOL ATTENDED: "Yale."
VOTED MOST LIKELY TO: "Lie about law school attended."
HUMILIATING MOMENT: "Attorney cum quickly."
NOTEABLE CASE: "The Simpson case. Uh, Homer Simpson. Wait, that's Fox. Next question."
LESSON FROM SUPERHEROES 101: "If you find yourself trapped by your enemy, sapped of your powers and facing swirling blades, try stating your situation in simple declarative phrases: 'I'm trapped by my enemy, sapped of my powers and those swirling blades are coming at me quick!' Usually everybody just loses interest and goes home."
ADVICE FOR NOVICE 'TOONS: "Same thing I tell 'mans: use 'postrophes sparingly."
SIDEKICK WOES: "All I can say is, do everything you can to make sure they don't join the union."
ASPIRATIONS: "To dream. To soar. To lift my eyes to the heavens that my spirit may follow 'n' shit."
INSPIRATIONS: "Stanley Aquaman, Certified Public Accountant—talented, dependable, and in this day and age, stands out for his honesty. Plus, the thing he can do with calling the fish—an inspiration to us all."

GAMESTER FLOODLIGHT

$15

We have officially discovered the ultimate Game Boy Advance light, the Gamester Floodlight. The unit uses a soft white micro fluorescent which illuminates the entire screen in bright, glare-free light with no hot spot and no magnifier. At an incredibly reasonable $15 (batteries included), the light is so good, it negates the need for a back-lit GBA. Well, almost.

When not in use, the Floodlight folds up quite neatly.

VISIONTEK GEFORCE TI4600 128 MB DDR

$400 www.visiontek.com

So you need a $400 graphics card? Probably not. Do you want to own the VisionTek GeForce 4? You bet your last Visa dollar! The specs include 128MB of RAM, 650 MHz DDR memory speed and an amazing GPU with a 300MHz core clock speed. This gives you almost double the memory bandwidth of the GeForce 3.

The card includes three outputs—VGA, DVI and S-video. One downside, for those who want to use two monitors, is that you must buy a separate adapter. If you want to watch you favorite DVD movie, you can use the included Cyberlink's Power DVD software. It also comes with PowerDirector for making your own movies.

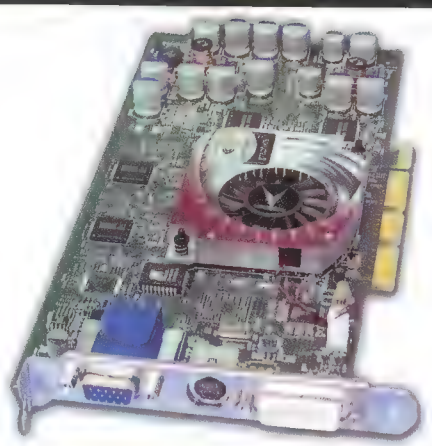
You know you have something special when you play the included demos, some of the most amazing graphics we have ever seen. But come on: $400 for a video card?

Another downside is that the card is *way* ahead of its time since most games don't take advantage of the capabilities of this amazing card... yet. If your budget comes up short, buy one of the still outstanding GeForce 3 cards. But if you have the bucks and you must own the ultimate in gaming video adapters, run, don't walk to the store and grab this awesome device. Using this card on games like *Warcraft III* will absolutely blow your mind and if you're a Quaker (and we don't mean the guy on the oatmeal box)—you'll be in heaven.

Make sure you check the Internet for the best pricing. We found the card for as little as $337—did we say "as little as?"

See you on the radio!
Marc Cohen and Mark Oleesky

Marc Cohen & Mark Oleesky are the hosts of the highly rated Computer and Technology Show on KABC radio. The show can be heard every Saturday morning from 10AM to 1PM in the Greater Los Angeles area on 790AM . E-mail them any time at computershow@kabc.com or call them on air at 1-800-222-KABC.



WARNING: WHEN THE GAME TURNS OFF, SO DO YOUR POWERS.

You cannot fly. You are not *stronger than a locomotive* or *faster than a speeding bullet*. You have no business attempting to use superpowers outside the realm of *Superman: Shadow of Apokolips*. Any attempt to do so will undoubtedly result in broken legs, arms, fingers and toes, sprained ankles, bruised ribs and egos, loss of limbs, pride, and ultimately-life. Just remember sport, when the game turns off, so do your powers.

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BEST PS2 ADVENTURE GAME E3 2002 – IGN

ONIMUSHA™ 2
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Violence
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